

# SUNDAYS.

BY MRS OLIPHANT.

“ This day my Saviour rose,  
And did inclose this light for his.

Christ hath took in this piece of ground,  
And made a garden there for those  
Who want herbs for their wound.

“ Thou art a day of mirth ;  
And where the weekdays trail on ground,  
Thy flight is higher, as thy birth.  
Oh, let me take thee at the bound,  
Leaping with thee from seven to seven,  
Till that we both, being tossed from earth,  
Fly hand in hand to heaven !”

HERBERT.

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# SUNDAYS.

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## INTRODUCTORY.

IT is fashionable to speak of our "gloomy Sundays." Real or imaginary, they are the *bête noire* of the popular fancy, or rather of those leaders and guides of English imagination, who persuade the world in general to accept their opinion as the opinion of the public. The whole matter is a hard and perplexing question in our artificial condition of society and busy mode of life; and I do not venture to enter upon any discussion of the subject, nor to consider the puzzling cross-light which modern wants, needs, and expediencies cast upon the commandment, which, like all other commandments, is exceeding broad, and full of all adaptation to all our necessities, could we only

find them out. But London, where there are miles of streets and millions of inhabitants—where, hidden in dreary courts and lanes, are the poorest of the poor, entirely out of the ken, though almost under the eyes, of the richest of the rich—London, where half the current customs of existence are anomalies, and where people, placed at the extreme points of social life, put to scorn the laws and regulations which bind that happiest portion of humanity, the classes which lie between the great and the small, and who are bound by wholesome law, discipline, and order, in a manner almost impossible either to the very small or the very great—London, and all the great lesser towns which resemble it, is the most difficult ground in the world for a great simple rule, plain, grave, and absolute, like that which consecrates the Sabbath-day. The question is painful and difficult in the highest degree, and can be decided lightly only by those careless thinkers who are deceived by the face of gaiety abroad into a system of amusement-making for the people here, which is scarcely less ugly than it is foolish; or by those good people, not thinkers at all, who conclude that everybody should go to church, and so dismiss the matter without further trouble.

It is easy to be arbitrary either on one side or another; but it is not easy to look abroad upon a London Sunday—to think of the multitudes of people to whom this morning should bring rest, refreshment, a very spring of life and hope—whose minds might be brightened, whose burdens might be lightened, whose heart and soul might be moved and invigorated for all inevitable trials, not by picture-galleries or collections of fossils, but by the Word and power of God—and to know that neither one way nor another, in all human probability, can that Word reach them. It is “their own fault,” but it is not all their own fault; and did this same populace take us at our word, and go to church as we bid them, rather an alarming spectacle would follow; and how we should do when the besieging crowd came surging up in overwhelming waves into our churches, turning us out of our pews, thrusting up to the very steps of the altar, and hanging on upon the pulpit stairs, is rather a puzzling question. We have no room for these heathen multitudes, who send their dinners to the bakers to be cooked, and walk in the parks afterwards. We cannot approve of them, and provide bands for them, and encourage them to spend their Sabbaths in dusty

pursuit of something called "pleasure." We cannot condemn them either; instead of that, one's heart warms to them as they go about the parks with their children in the sweet Sunday sunshine. If it were but possible to call out aloud to them all, every one, with the voice and the love of God; to compel them, with the tender and strong compulsion of hearts akin, to bring those tired and troubled lives of theirs, like our own, so weary and heavy laden, to the only Lord and helper of labouring men! It would be a great deal easier, no doubt, to turn them off summarily as Sabbath breakers, or else to declare, with some enlightened leaders of public opinion, that the Sabbath was made for pictures, and walks, and music, and that they do these things much better in France. Either way, which is arbitrary, is easy. The difficulty is, seeing our neighbour's wants and trials truly, heartily wishing him every possible pleasure—even a good dinner—and knowing that there is not a vacant seat for him in the church, how, loving the Sabbath and holding it most holy, we are to deal with our neighbour who, all uninstructed in its privileges, takes a vague pleasure in his weekly leisure, but loves it not.



This is a matter which cannot be treated summarily, and it is one of the most serious problems of the time ; but I do not pretend to enter upon a discussion so great and many-sided. I take the gloomy Sundays plainly and distinctly as the "own fault" of most people who complain of them. True, we have very often—a great deal too often—dull sermons, and these are not our own doing ; but for the rest of the day, if we happen to be idle in mind, peevish in temper, disinclined to make either ourselves or anything about us a delight, is it fair to turn forthwith upon the day which, of its own nature, is so beneficent and so divine ? For us, who are the most perverse and contradictory of nations, and who have made up our mind many a time, with obstinate pugnacity, that we will not be merry or be sad as our rulers bid us, it seems the most absurd thing in the world to complain, like spoiled children, that no one entertains us on our weekly holiday. Ours is not a country in which a statesman of a theoretical turn of mind can deal with a few millions of men as with so many arithmetical figures, whom, seeing he thinks for them, arranges for them, and saves them all trouble of opinions, beliefs, and convictions, he is bound also to

amuse. On the contrary, we are a nation of individual persons, jealous of nothing so much as of dictation; and the practical tendency, on which we are so much inclined to congratulate ourselves, has proved to us, over and over again, that it is only by individuals—every man for himself, and God for us all—that any great movement can be accomplished. Therefore it will not do to say to all the crowds of this kingdom, “Be happy: it is Sunday—you have nothing to do but enjoy yourselves,” though we back the adjuration with all the Sunday amusements possible; and it is quite as futile to issue a general advice of the same kind, though differing in manner, bidding these same crowds, “Go to church.” A crowd, save for the popular inspiration of a moment’s enthusiasm—an inspiration like that which the old Easterns attributed to the insane, sometimes almost ludicrous, and sometimes altogether sublime—is an entirely unmanageable material; and to do anything real and lasting with our people, it is indispensable to descend out of the grand and general, and to address man by man.

And, perhaps, it is true that religious circles have been somewhat forgetful of the fact that the Sabbath

is not the fast but the festival of Christianity—that every week has its Easter morning, and that it is fit to say, “The Lord has risen,” upon every one of those memorial days which commemorate that resurrection, which is the Divine seal and assurance of all our hopes. Take this as you will, you cannot take it sadly. True, we have sinned, or our Lord had not died; but it is not our sin which comes upon us in the tale of that spring morning, far away in the holy years of our redemption-time, when the women came weeping, or too sad to weep—when the disciples, dismayed, despairing, yet pondering in their amazed and troubled spirits strange promises still unfulfilled, went hither and thither in desolate groups, not knowing what they looked for—and when to both came that unbelievable deliverance, that voice like a silver trumpet out of heaven, that unspeakable wonder, mystery, triumph, which it seems almost strange to think was endurable, and killed no one in the agony of unspeakable joy—“He is not here, he is risen.” These were human hearts, faint, trembling, slow to believe; to their wistful, anxious souls the light did not flash with immediate certainty—they were afraid to trust without closer demonstration—and, perhaps,

it was this weakness which saved John or Peter, in the wild, strange, extraordinary revulsion, from falling into sudden madness, or giving up the ghost. Nothing can bring to us the terrible personal excitement, the reality of actual and visible occurrence, which belonged to these associates of the Lord; but undiminished and undiminishable we have the joy. Long acquaintance has sobered down into every-day words and familiar expressions a truth which can never cease to be the most marvellous and momentous known to man; but still, as the clouds break and the sun rises—still as the Sabbath light falls over a land redeemed, and the leisure day, the weekly rest, comes pure out of heaven, the special heritage of overtasked brains and hands toilworn—with what a charm and exhilaration comes the cry, “The Lord is risen,” the burden and refrain of the world’s perpetual matin song, the universal chorus of the Sabbath-day!

For which sake I would have all Christian people brighten not only their hearts and spirits, but their very hearths and dwelling-places in honour of this day. We are not all soul, nor all intellect, and I see no reason why we should refuse to suffer the natural impulse of a heart exhilarated to make everything

around us as gay, as bright, and as fair to look upon as everything is by nature, which comes from the hand of God. "Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of putting on of apparel"—yet withal, when the more precious ornament is safe, let no one be afraid of the apparel too. For I cannot help thinking that there is a natural sentiment, innocent, lovely, and of good report, in that spring and impulse, alike of heart, and mind, and frame, which tempts forth the prettiest dress and fairest colours, to meet the sunshine on those sweet family Sabbaths—those days of household union, which, perhaps, the young people appreciate only vaguely now, but which they will remember with wistful love and tenderness when they are young no longer; for the Sabbath day is, *par excellence*, the family day. I would have it entirely so. I should like to see the world and its rules shut out altogether from this sacred bit of ground—to see the little children, whom necessity or common custom sends to the nursery all the week through, gathering all around the family board on Sunday to the wholesome mid-day meal—I would garnish the table as if it were for a feast, and if there was one poor, desolate, or friendless, within the range

of the family acquaintance, I would have him join the cheerful meal, which should be like a service of thanksgiving. I remember, long ago, being sent upon a weekly errand, after the early Sabbath-day's dinner, to a poor invalid near, with a share of all that was best upon the table. It was not quite what one calls necessity, for our poor pensioner *had* daily bread, yet I think it was a Sabbath errand which the mother of the house gave to her child, and not to a servant; and I like that kind old practice of neighbourship, the "sending portions," which finds a place, like so much besides of the fairest and tenderest Christianity, in that old Jewish law, which shallow people call hard and stern. Few things seem so likely to induce that personal friendliness, which it is so hard to make between the different classes of society, as the habit of sharing one's own daily bread, in the same form and fashion in which one's own household partakes of it, with one's neighbours who are in want; and no day seems more fit for this manner of charity than the one festival which is universally acknowledged by all Christians. Very great people, unfortunately, like very poor, are shut out, in a great degree, from the gracious, common, personal acts and simple family

customs of less exalted classes ; but the majority who are able to have and to spare is a very large one. Why not make this, of course under due limit, a commoner feature of the Sabbath economy ? Only it ought not to be done vicariously through a servant, but by one's own hands, or by the hands of our children. I think the children would love the family Sunday all the better too, if it were filled with offices of needful service, if it were made a domestic habit to spare the servants on that day, and to minister each to the other—to return, in fact, out of the artificial existence of our extreme civilisation, and have one resting day, as far as it is practicable, of the natural and primitive life.

I have seen young people piously occupied on Sunday with good books—excellent books, full of the saddened experience of lifetimes full of trial, treatises of consolation addressed to the consciences of men and women heavy laden in the troublous course of life ; but in the pages which they read, because it was right to read them, there was no account made of their own youth, the brightest of earthly things—no allowance left for that elasticity which will not be daunted, and that hope which knows no bounds. Why so ?—it is

not sinful to be young—and youth under the darkest circumstances *will* be happy, let us say what we like against it. I have seen young Christians painfully persuaded of the fact that “they who live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecutions”—afraid of their own safety and happiness lest it should be a proof against their acceptance, and trying to make out persecutions for themselves in a school-boy’s jest, or the gentle restraint of father or mother. Wait but a little, you tender young heroes—wait till your life comes on with all its struggles, its hardships, the inevitable cup which one time or another will not pass away from you; by and by days will come in which you will not be too happy—but in the meantime, what you have to do is to rest, and rejoice, and grow strong in the leisure of your youth.

It will not do to ignore this natural period when everything is a delight—it is bad policy to fret the sunny current by imaginary trials; the trials will come soon enough, and press hard enough in time; and I see no reason why we should not acknowledge, to the full, that tenderness of God which makes youth a pleasure to itself, endowing it with gladness and courage not to be subdued. Why should we desire to subdue them?



Every man for himself, and not another, must make personal acquaintance with all those ills, through which, as between the chained lions, it has pleased God to ordain our path; but the old pragmatism of a century ago, which endeavoured to prepare children for the disappointments of life by making false promises of pleasure, and withdrawing them as soon as the expectation was aroused, have fallen out of usage, fortunately, in our times: and I do not see why we should use our middle-age experience, our sad acquaintance with death, grief, and calamity, to discourage the souls of children who will come to know these things by and by, as we know them now, for themselves. We who have lost parents, brothers, children—we who have as many, perhaps more, in heaven than we have here in this bereaved and saddened country—we who would give up all the world and all its hopes, could we but embrace once more with trembling arms what lies within one grave—it is but nature to conceive that even the humanest part of us, our very flesh and heart, should long and yearn many a time to be over the river, safe, beyond all partings, with our Lord upon the heavenly side. But it is not reasonable to look for this same sentiment in the young

heart which knows none of our trials. It was Paul the aged—Paul who had seen many a son and brother fall by his side—and whose spirit had burned many a time with that yearning impatience and protest against death and sorrow, that sore and terrible sympathy, which, even when at peace itself, knows that some one else is smitten, and would fain cry aloud, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus, come make an end of it all, Thou who alone hast the power;”—it was Paul, in the heat and labour of the day, who said, in the sighing of his soul, that he desired to be with Christ, which is far better. But it is safer for youth to think of living than of dying—to slacken its love of life and its hold of the earth (God’s creatures both, and good) only as it comes to experiment, and grows out of its early privilege of hope.

I think it is not wise to suppose that precisely the same spiritual atmosphere is proper for seventy and seventeen, or that counsels addressed to people in the mid-day of life are applicable, word for word, to those in its early morning. Except in rare and undeniable cases, it seems to me, looking back upon my own experience, that to feel this world sad and barren, to understand how “to die is gain,”

and to look forward with longing to the other country, is not possible to youth. I remember thinking it right and necessary to feel so, and conscientiously endeavouring after it, believing it merely my own guiltiness which made it so hard. Now the times have changed; I begin to apprehend how the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together, looking for its redemption—how the tired world longs and cries for the issue—and how the only great consolation in this fight of afflictions is, that by and by it will all be over, and we, awaked out of our feverish dream of mortal existence, redeemed and put in perfect harmony with all the glorious creation of God, will begin, in presence of the Lord, our real life. But the very thought of this gradual and slow enlightenment is a burden to one's mind when one is young; and is it not better to sanction all the generous dreams of youth, and sanctify its natural brightness, than to put upon its unwilling neck the yoke of *our* experience, foreign to its own? I think so; I think we cannot have anything too bright, too cheerful, too encouraging for our sons and daughters—and that one of our dearest and most happy duties is to associate everything holy with everything dear, lovely, honest, and of good report—

and among the rest, with the truest and fullest meaning of the words, "To make the Sabbath a delight"—the fairest day in the household calendar, the centre point of all those home recollections which are the solace of many a darker year.

With this idea, without meaning any special advice, which I do not feel myself qualified to give, I should like simply to talk for an hour or two with any one who pleases about the Sundays of the year, holding strongly this one opinion on the matter, that of all days the Sabbath is the last to make into a day of humiliation—being, on the contrary, a perennial triumph and shout of victory in heaven and earth—a day which makes one's recollection glow with all the songs of exultation and rejoicing, of which the Scriptures are full—with the triumphant chorus of David's Psalms, and the magnificent words in which Paul declares that truth, of which "I am persuaded"—and, closest and most intimate of all, with the familiar tidings which brightens every Sabbath morning into the joyfulest of all commemorations, "The Lord has risen." People who would fain make of it a vulgar holiday, full of common shows, common fatigue, and the common bustle of

our ordinary life, complain of us that we make it gloomy. I think we do not make it gloomy. I think people find it tiresome who sanctify it solely to the poor endeavour of doing nothing, which is an indifferent kind of Sabbaticism. Doing nothing implies, in all circumstances, all manner of dulness; and Sunday, as well as every other day, must indeed hang heavy upon those unfortunate people whose minds and hands are alike unoccupied, and who, having no amusements to rouse them, drowse out the weary hours, till it is time again to sow and to reap, to buy and to sell. But to do nothing is no evangel—neither does it bear any resemblance to the true Sabbath, in which it is well to do many things, and which is a weekly haven of God's own making, for the quiet consideration of all our difficulties, trials, and temptations, as well as for His own service, and in remembrance of Him who liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore.

## CHAPTER I.

## THE FIRST ADORATION.

To follow the calendar of the year, according to the ritual of the Church of England, is not our purpose. Yet it is impossible not to perceive the picturesque arrangement which makes a "Christian year" of those months and days which are slowly working out our own life. In Scotland, for instance, which is the country, among all others, most bent upon holding its faith by pure force of heart and spirit, and which refuses to accept any aid from the imagination, it is not easy to realise how intimately the ecclesiastical division of the year enters into the popular mind on this side of the Border. In Scotland, as a nation, we have lost the habit of associating special events in the sacred history with special days. Christmas and Easter are but names to us—names which very often we do not approve of, and in very many cases

understand little about. As an effectual and radical separation from all that savours of Romanism, no doubt this removal of all the ancient festivals was wise in the Reformers ; but one cannot help regretting sometimes, when one sees how matters are in the other half of the kingdom, that Scotland has deprived herself of so powerful, and in good guidance, so innocent a help towards the realisation of those events and circumstances upon which our faith is built. There are, of course, snares in everything ; and those suggestions which would tempt us to set holy days apart and separate, and count the common days as less sacred and less belonging to God, are the darker side of the subject. But as we go step by step upon our way, it is pleasant to hold in our hand the thread of sacred story, and remember how step by step, patiently and without haste, the Lord of our redemption traced that terrible road, knowing all that lay before Him, yet turning aside from nothing, and bearing the cross, in His divine and sorrowful consciousness, from the very door of Joseph's house in Nazareth—a longer *via dolorosa* than the footpath at Jerusalem. It is very well to hold that anchor to our wandering fancies, and to draw back the thought, which is continually

astray, with recollections of those solemn incidents which befell "as on this day." A steady power of thinking is, perhaps, one of the very rarest of mental endowments; for most of us it is but a reverie, disconnected, broken, full of sudden starts and pauses, sudden pictures suddenly disturbed, a kind of panoramic contemplation of everything hovering within our mental range, which we dignify with the name of thought; but to be able to turn back in this reverie to one central figure and event, connected, should it be even by an arbitrary arrangement, with the day which is passing over our own heads, is an assistance scarcely to be over-estimated; and it is good to feel and to employ this perpetual reference, and let everything remind us of that divinest Kinsman who, in heaven and earth, is the beginning and the ending of all comfort and all hope.

We are not so abstract of late days as we used to be. Principles, loosely so called, abstract conclusions, and opinions, do not hold sway among us as they once did. We begin to have a strong personal inclination, a tendency to put faith in an individual, and look, reversing the old rule, not at measures but at men. We incline lovingly towards the old times,



when the work of the world was carried on in a more magnificent fashion, handed across a continent, or over the heads of a generation, from one hero's hand to another, to be accomplished with an absolute and splendid unity, possible only to those glorious despots, heaven-appointed, who unconstitutionally and illegally have done what parliament and legislation could not do. Perhaps there are no heroes in these days; but there is a ready audience for them if any should come, and a strong regard and inclination towards things individual rather than things abstract, a visible preference for the man who will *do* above the intellectual system which only prompts what ought to be done. Wild enough vagaries of popular fancy sometimes back out this tendency of the times; but its brighter feature is the directness, the personal explicit individual eye, with which the bearers of His name turn towards the Lord, who is not a doctrine, nor a theological system, but a Person near and present to us all. The more we turn from the consideration of our own feelings, thoughts, and fancies, which are vain enough in the best of us, to Him the grand individual Presence, who does not scorn to take part in all which concerns us, and whose footsteps,

known and visible, are on the earth and among men, the more healthful and vigorous our Christianity will be. It is seldom very safe to think upon our thoughts, to study our own mind, to lie in wait for morsels of meditation which we can rejoice in as good, or resolutions which, being human, are sure to vary, to change, and to be broken. I cannot see, indeed, how contemplation of ourselves, even should it be in exercises of continual penitence, can, under any circumstance, be profitable or conducive to our spiritual health and vigour. A sick man who watches his own symptoms falls most frequently into miserable hypochondriacism; and I confess it always grieves and distresses me to find good people commenting, in published books and diaries, upon the momentary vicissitudes of their own mind and spirit, or pleasing themselves with the recollection that now and then they are enabled to have comfortable thoughts or gracious feelings concerning holy things. It is like rejoicing over the faint presentment, in a dimmed and cloudy mirror, of something beautiful exceedingly, which we prefer not to look on at first hand; and whether it be the intellectual play which poets, turning from the world of God's creation to the world in their own

minds, make with the thoughts and fancies which degenerate in the process into conceit and foolishness—or the spiritual play which Christian people, turning from the Lord Jesus himself, the object of all observation, sometimes make with their own experiences, meditations, and prayers—it seems alike unelevating and unworthy, a practice which cannot fail to weaken the nature which entertains it. A humble man of ordinary intellect, who thinks of his God, his neighbour, and what work he has in his hands to accomplish, is a nobler moral object than the great genius who thinks of himself; and if that be the case, how much better to turn from our own consciousness, so limited, so poor, and so unsteady, to the greatest, holiest, most wonderful image which ever shone upon the comprehension of man. We cannot understand ourselves, poor creatures though we be; but humbly, dimly, wonderingly, we can understand our Lord, how He stands among us with the children at His feet, a world above all our wisdom in His divine simplicity, yet open to our eyes and to our faith.

With the children at His feet! loving to have them there, choosing them out of the crowds about Him, unconscious little souls not so far off from heaven as

we, to set them in the midst with their innocent marvelling eyes, examples to us all. That was a lesson unthought of in all our philosophy, "Except ye become as a little child." It was what He Himself had been not a great many years before;—and there is something so touching in the thought of a child, meek, helpless, humble, yet divine, that it is not wonderful to find how the primitive imagination of the old middle ages, seeking tangible exponents of the faith which was overloaded with tradition, should have made tale upon tale and picture upon picture of the glorious child. Perhaps it was easier to realise Him as a child, clothed in the appearance of the most innocent age, and making that sublime, than as a man, traversing the common path and appearing in their own semblance, and in the perfection of their own physical estate among men. But we are not confined to either period, and it is good to receive as an inheritance the whole great history, the beginning and the ending—without reservation, the entire life of the Lord.

The year begins with Him in that first rude resting-place of His—the stable at Bethlehem—and begins with an event singularly illustrative of the whole

history, not only of our Saviour Himself, but of His gospel. It is what is called the Epiphany—the manifestation to the Gentiles—an occurrence so strangely at variance with all the other circumstances of His sacred birth and infancy, and of itself so remarkable, that it also has furnished forth an innumerable quantity of the tangible illustrations of those illiterate old ages, which, having no books, and setting no great store by the sermons of their monks and friars, were fain to be content with the pencil, sometimes held by Giotto or Angelico, sometimes dipped in nature's loveliest colours by the tender hand of Raphael. It is well enough known how legendary lore has busied itself with the names of the wise men of the east, those three fabulous and imaginary kings who reign in mouldy glory over an empire of relics—unhappy bones of dead men piously defrauded of the grave and rest which was their due—in the sacred city of Cologne. But, leaving the grosser romance of their after destiny, how strange is the sudden gleam of light thrown backward over an unknown life—back with an electric touch, finding out Balaam, Job, and, sacrest of all, Melchisedec, among the unrecorded crowd of the Gentile nations—

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from the sudden appearance, unexplained and unaccounted for, of these wise men ! How the hope and knowledge of Messias to come had reached to them in the unknown countries from whence they travelled—from what strange source they, who were not Jews, had been instructed in the glorious expectation of this Deliverer—perhaps of what number of untaught believers, vaguely fed by the crumbs which fell from the children's table, and scarcely witting what they hoped for—these wandering Magi were ambassadors—or whether, indeed, they might not be descended of some race or family holding an oral gospel from the lips of the patient patriarch or the priestly king—how God, too, taking account of the knowledge which they had, and not of that they had not, used their own lore for their enlightenment, and led them by a star. All these questions are matters on which we have no instruction. We know of their coming—we perceive their approach—these strange Oriental figures, with their wealthy offerings ; but the sacred history has no leisure for digression, and all that we learn of whence they came, or where they went, is a sudden suggestion, rapid, vivid, and full of interest, of an unknown people of whom God was the Father,

though Abraham was ignorant of them, and Israel acknowledged them not; or of some individual persons who had carried down, across the dark, from the fresh days after the flood, or from the starry Chaldean plains, where Terah sojourned with his sons, before any race or any land had special inheritance in the promise—the golden thread of faith.

Then those strange contradictory circumstances in the scene itself. The infant in the stable, unattended by even the humblest circumstances of comfort, yet with the splendour of a heavenly herald—a lavish and magnificent example of the glory which He might have had about Him if He would—the Star shining in at the humble door, lighting His earliest footsteps in the world. And thither came the wandering princes—men whom Herod even now had received with honour—to pay their homage to the King new born, in the awed and marvelling presence of Mary and Joseph, that Jewish man and maiden, poor but princely, to whom it pleased the Father to confide His Son. They came, these wise men, skilled in all the learning which their age and place could give, laden with such gifts as might propitiate kings, to bow before a child—a child poorly born of the holy

but narrow Jewish race, which knew little, and despised what it knew, of the wisdom of the Gentiles. So far as human perception went, a scene more anomalous never presented itself to the common eye—uniting, as it does, bare poverty, humbleness, and limited knowledge, with wealth, distinction, and wisdom, and placing the lower in the higher place. Who can suppose what might be the thoughts of Mary and of Joseph seeing this first testimony to the Son of God and Son of man? What a course of glory and triumph must their uninstructed thoughts have predicted for Him whom, in His cradle, these princely sages came from afar to worship? The light had but begun to shine, and already its dawning warmed the hearts of distant Gentiles; already the outer world sent in its dutiful homage and offering; and what glorious issue must lie before the man when already the hoar wisdom of these antique ages worshipped upon its knees before the child?

And perhaps with the wise men, perhaps before them, came another embassy from the antipodes of the human race; the shepherds from the plains, peasants of Judea, homely men of Judah and of Benjamin, knowing the laws of their nation, and the pro-



mises of their faith, but doubly excluded from other knowledge—bearing no tribute, unless there might be truly the lamb which the old painters bring in on the shoulder of one of the simple worshippers—shepherds fresh from the moonlight fields, the open country, where the sky was still a-glow with a remembrance of the scarce departed angels. One does not know which is most touching—the wise men travel-worn and laden, laying down their wisdom, in a profound and marvellous humility, before the feet of the infant who was to be the wisdom, the power, and the salvation of our universal race; or the shepherds, ignorant and wistful, scarcely noting from the other lights of heaven that steadfast star which shone upon the place where “the young child was,” bearing still in their startled ears an echo of the angel’s song, and knowing only that this was the son of David, who, by some mysterious means, should restore the kingdom to Israel. But the double group of worshippers is singularly symbolical of all the after progress of the gospel—that gospel which, with a divine equality, touches the heart of the monarch on his throne, and the beggar by the wayside—which enrolls at once the noblest intellects and the most feeble, and brings

wisdom and ignorance, science and simplicity, the one as bare of self-importance as the other, to an equal meeting at the Redeemer's feet. To make the difference greater, the one band were far-travelled, strangers in Jerusalem, bound to depart again to their undiscovered home; the others were at the very door, watching their sheep within sight of the walls of that city of David, to which their angel-visitors pointed them the way. These two groups, representatives of two grand sections of humanity, dividing the world between them, stand in our recollection on either side of the Holy Child—they gave Him welcome to the sacred country, consecrated by His own sufferings, and to the wide, dark heathen world, lying unseen and overclouded, far beyond the limits of Israel, which He had come to save.

It would not be very hard for Sunday fare—the bread of gladness good for a festival—if we had nothing more than this. We have all, without restraint, to give us comfort; but I think it would be very good, an exercise full of delight and pleasantness, to take the Lord's course day by day, and to think, as the year begins, how that wonderful life began—and what miserable mockeries without it

would be all our kindly union, our love of families, and gatherings of friends. We, who shall all die by and by—to make love would only be to make grief, but for that child who was born at Jerusalem, and whose star called out of the dark some forefathers of our souls, to whom the heavenly messenger proclaimed, “He has come!—He whom nature, all-glorious with stars and suns, cannot produce, but can receive.” He came, and the Gentiles made their acknowledgment of Him—did it silently without voice or word, and departed again into the great silence, which closed over them for ever. For ever! By and by we may hear the tale with circumstance, when we meet the sages of the pristine time in that Jerusalem where we all shall be at home.

If any one had endeavoured from this beginning to make a fictitious gospel, how strangely different from the real one it must have been! One can imagine the sublime romance which a human imagination would have made of the tale; how the divine infant should have grown, not perhaps into the vulgar glories of rank or empire, but into such solemn, universal, and marvelling veneration, as our own superior knowledge tempts us to suppose we should render to

Him now—how every word falling from His sacred lips should have been treasured up in the hearts of the whole people—how all the youth of Judah, a voluntary guard of honour, should have spent their lives, man by man, ere harm or reproach came near the son of David—and how, if He must die, He should have died at last by some sudden and fierce assault of barbarians without, who never had an opportunity of looking upon His holy countenance. But the real story changes, out of the first solemn morning of rejoicing, with a sad and humiliating revolution. He who, in His cradle, had charmed the subtle souls of the Gentile sages, and the ruder senses of the peasants of Judea—he whom Simeon and Anna hailed in the temple—had to fly straightway by night and suddenly towards the dark old land of bondage, the Egypt from which His mother's race had been delivered—had to fly, strange change, from angel's song and the prayers of the righteous, with the shriek of murdered children and the mother's agony ringing afar upon his ear! Sweet martyrs! Innocents beloved of God!—dying for Him unwittingly and unawares—dying for Him, in their tender unconsciousness of good and evil, as true a martyr's death

as Paul or Peter! Was it of little import in the sight of God that Rachel cried for her children with a voice that would not pause for comfort? Many a Rachel since has echoed that outcry, many a heart fainted in that dismal agony, watching the cruel hand of death how it came upon her child; but God knows how many a hundred years it is since Rachel forgot all her grieving, or maybe even rejoiced to recall it, when she found the little ones again, safe, every blessed head, at the feet of their Lord in heaven. Courage! We who have lost, like Rachel, shall by and by, like her, receive again.

But it is a strange reverse of the picture from that audience in which a fond fancy might have seen the whole world represented, an impressive and solemn guarantee of all honour and reverent appreciation to the newly-come deliverer. When this grand ceremonial was over, the dark world beyond, the unquiet sea of human passions, rose up envious and blasphemous against the hope of Israel. It was nothing to Herod that this hope was the sole remaining glory of his people. He, poor wicked fool, thought only of the peril to his petty tributary crown. There was not in his monstrous sin a single spur

even of ambition, nothing but what was mean and ignoble—fear of his own miserable importance, fear of some one mightier than he taking the sceptre out of his grasp. *That* was human too; after the opening scene which shews us the loyal spirits of the race doing their homage, to turn over and find the disloyal and malignant gaining his momentary triumph, sending far away from him as effectually as he could the only possible helper who in heaven or earth *could* deliver him, and staining his own soul, name, and history with the most revolting of crimes, in order that by that means the unfortunate wretch, fit type of his race, might get banished out of his sight, killed, if it could be, all hope and possibility of a higher life; for the miserable murderer knew the Scriptures, and knew that it was Messiah the prince whom he meant to kill. It does not seem a singular or unexampled instance either. We kill no innocents now-a-days, but we very often do everything we can, not excepting some *little* sin, such small matters as a lie or a fit of passion, to get Christ as far away as possible, and keep Him off from that full possession of our soul and spirit which we know in our hearts is inevitable if He once gets entrance there. And here,

in the holy record, stand in wonderful proximity the two events—the wise men worshipping, sublime in their humbleness, and Herod, the petty tyrant, hiding his insignificance in a horrible tragic mask of crime, trembling in insane terror which, rather than worship, strove to kill—a contrast well worth looking at, well worth thinking over, and not so entirely removed from actual ordinary possibilities of recurrence as one might suppose.

## CHAPTER II.

## GOING UP TO JERUSALEM.

THE winter was over and gone,  
The streams were waking among the hills,  
And in every valley of Lebanon  
The air was sweet with the voice of rills.  
The tender corn was green in the blade,  
And I was glad when my neighbours said—  
Arise, let us go to Jerusalem  
To worship before the Lord ;  
I beheld, and lo, I reckoned them  
Small and great, who echoed that word,  
From every peak of Lebanon ;  
From the shade of the cedars, vast and old,  
From the woodman's lodge and the shepherd's fold,  
They had risen from their households every one,  
To call on the name of the Lord.



With my first-born forth I went—  
While Miriam, on her mother-bosom,  
Rocking the babe, the winter's blossom,  
    Abode in the shelter of the tent—  
I left her alone, and woman-weak,  
    Fearing nothing and witting well,  
'That Assyrian robber ne'er could break  
    Through the guard of the God of Israel.  
Forth upon the joyful road,  
    Through little vales, most sweet and still,  
Hid by the tender hand of God,  
    In the great furrows of the hill,  
Yielding each like water-springs ;  
Another company of friends—  
Where every neighbour forward wends,  
Towards the feast of holy things,  
City of David, mount of God !  
Thus went we, singing, on the road—

“ O Lord of Hosts, thy tents are fair !

“ Dwelling afar and faint at heart,  
    O God of Life ! my God and King !  
    A soul that sighs for thee I bring,  
        Still seeking where thou art ;

O Lord of Hosts, my King and God,  
Blessed are they who dwell with thee!  
Blessed are they, still praising thee,  
Who make thy dwelling their abode!  
Would I might keep a door! or dwell upon the  
threshold there!  
O Lord of Hosts, thy tents are fair!

Behold, the lonely sparrow finds a house,  
Beneath the eaves the swallow makes her  
nest;  
Would I might build and rest,  
O Lord of Hosts, thus in thy holy house,  
Even at thine altars, O my King and God!"

Thus went we, singing, on the holy road.

And ere the day was spent,  
Great Lebanon looked down upon our way,  
Gazing, while further forth we went,  
Silent and sad as one might say—  
"O blessed human race, ye go where I  
May not approach nor worship"—even so,  
Perchance, the Prophet saw our fathers go  
Over this Jordan. Lo, thou liftest high,

O thou great Lebanon !  
Thy forehead veiled with snow ;  
As though, like Moses, God's face looking on,  
Thou mightest no longer now  
Look forth unveiled on man.

Then turned we all unto Jerusalem,  
Our hearts and eyes,  
And when encamped beneath the stars and skies  
I thought of Miriam and her babe—of them  
The boy and I spoke softly, for we knew,  
The Lord was their abiding-place and shield  
Most true.

And as we travelled, so the nights and days,  
The tender hours of spring,  
Came brightening o'er the rivers and green ways  
With dews of morn and even—nights and days,  
Whereat the valleys and the hills rejoice,  
And scattered villages lift up their voice,  
Of the year's hope to sing.  
And still from every house and home of man,  
Cities defenced, and tents upon the plains,  
As liberal as the early rains,  
Swelling our streams they ran.

We travelled, families and companies,  
Each man among his neighbours and his kin ;  
Children and maidens, youths and elders wise,  
Still to Jerusalem turning eager eyes,  
Pondering what lay within  
The gates of Sion—where, with solemn word,  
Giving of thanks, we went, brethren and kin,  
To eat the passover before the Lord.

We were alone, the boy and I ;  
He making thus his earliest vows,  
He was the first-born of my house—  
Sole child until the Lord on high,  
To our declining pathway sent,  
The babe with Miriam in the tent.  
Eager he was as boy might be,  
These holy mysteries to see—  
Singing of Israel's story high,  
Pressing upon the lengthened road,  
Longing to worship and come nigh  
To that Jerusalem of God.

“ O thou Jerusalem !  
Within thy gates our feet shall stand !

Thither the tribes go up, the tribes of God  
From all this Hebrew land ;  
To where the witnesses of Israel stand.

“ O thrones of David, set in judgment there,  
Jerusalem most fair !  
For thee and for thy peace I pray.  
Upon thy palaces and walls be peace,  
Prosperity, and blessing, and increase !  
Thus for my brethren's sakes, I say ;  
For the Lord's house, and all this crowd, for them,  
I bless thee, thou Jerusalem !”

Then as we sang, the ancient story rose  
Unto our hearts, how, travelling on his way,  
Israel unfriended, set in weak array  
Against a world of foes—  
God, making no account of those,  
Delivered swift, and furthered on his way.  
Praise to the Lord who keepeth Israel !  
Our hearts rose in us as we trod  
Upward upon the holy road,  
Where Jordan into sweet Gennesaret fell,  
Up to the feast of God.

The fisher boats were sleeping by the lake,  
The fishermen towards Jerusalem,  
Secure that never storm should break  
The ships they left for God's own sake,  
Went forth, and we with them.

Yet was it very strange to see,  
The still sails droop o'er the still sea,  
And the Lord guarding all while on we went ;  
Then thought I upon Miriam in the tent.  
When once again the fisher's voice,  
Bade all our company in songs rejoice.

“ But for the Lord,  
Who stood upon our side,  
When, as the winds and waters, rose,  
The wrath of all his foes,  
Israel had perished in their pride.  
I bless the Lord  
Who stood upon our side.

“ Then had the waters overwhelmed our soul.  
O ye proud waters ! ye had swallowed wide,  
When into your great depths he fell,  
This wandering Israel ;  
But for the Lord, who stood upon our side ! ”

We went upon our way, and it was sweet ;  
The dove's voice brooded through the listening  
land,

And even beneath our sore wayfaring feet,  
The boy found flowers ; when I beheld them  
sweet,

I thought upon the babe at Miriam's breast,  
And of the spring hope and the harvest rest,  
And how the Lord's great ways abide and  
stand.

I think my neighbours thought like me ;

Sudden there rose up in our band,  
A song that trembled as it fell,  
With joy and tears, for Israel  
Returned to his own land.

“ Who goeth forth, and weepeth, bearing seed,  
Bringing his sheaves with joy shall come again ;  
We sow in tears and pain,  
Yet doth thy harvest cover all our need.

Great things for us the Lord hath done ;

O God of Israel ! our captivity

Exalted still thy name ;

The Lord hath done great things for them—

The heathen said; When we went free,  
We were like men that dream—  
Our mouths were filled with laughter and with  
    song,  
And still they mused, that heathen crowd  
    among,  
The Lord hath done great things for them !  
Thou turnedst Zion's bondage like a stream,  
We were as men that dream!"

The way was weary-long, the boy was young,  
His tender feet failed ere the day was spent,  
And oft I knew, when from my hand he hung,  
His heart was with his mother in the tent;  
Yet onward on our way we went.  
And I was glad for him and me,  
To see the hills I knew of old,  
From whose green summits we might see,  
Shining into the skies like gold,  
With all her housetops and her towers,  
And holy things that dwelt in them,—  
Jerusalem ! Jerusalem !—  
The blessed city which was ours,  
Yet was the Lord's of old.



The stars shone tender in the skies,  
The young grass rustled on our way,  
Upon the hills the evening gray  
Stole soft before our eyes.  
And these green heights, and nought but  
them,  
Stood 'twixt us and Jerusalem.  
Throughout our company there rose  
A rustle and a stir of joy,  
And I was glad because the boy  
Was loudest in the song with those  
Who hailed the city of the Lord.

Jerusalem ! Jerusalem !  
Though I was old, yet at that word  
The sleep went from me—forth I went  
Out to the threshold of the tent,  
And gazing how the shining night  
Came down upon these hills of God—  
Thus sang we till the morning light,  
Until upon the early road  
The pilgrims rose and took their way,  
Short travel of one sunny day,  
Unto the house of God.

“ I lift mine eyes unto the hills—O hills  
Of God !

Whence comes my help—my help comes from the  
Lord,

Who makes Jerusalem his abode,  
Who made the earth and heaven—O hills and skies !  
Thus lift I up mine eyes.

Behold the keeper of all Israel

Sleeps not nor slumbers, watching o'er this land ;  
Behold the Lord, He who defends thee well,  
Is upon thy right hand.

Thy comings and thy goings, lo ! the Lord  
Ever and evermore shall keep.

O hill of God, I lift mine eyes to see

Thy light—behold the Lord that watcheth thee  
Taketh no sleep ! ”

Then with the early light upon our way,

With songs and joy we past ;

Sweet was the sun upon this tender day,

Of all our pilgrim days the last.

But silence fell upon us as we came

Towards the hills' green heights, where we could see  
The glory of that great Jerusalem  
Arrayed as brides might be.

The boy was silent, leaning on my hand,  
His morning heart was moved, past song or word,  
Drawing so near the glory of our land,  
The city of the Lord.

Jerusalem ! Jerusalem !  
Whene'er we heard that cry,  
Silent we pressed, the boy and I,  
Close to the front, and stood with them,  
Who gazed first on Jerusalem.  
Jerusalem ! Jerusalem !  
I shouted loud unto the sky ;  
Then on my face I threw me there,  
O House of God most high !  
O city of the Lord most fair !

Then when we here had paused and prayed,  
In the first triumph of our joy,  
We joined our song, I and the boy,  
Unto the sudden music made  
By this rejoicing company.  
When every eye within the band,  
Under the solemn light could see,  
How round the Lord's Jerusalem  
The mountains stand.

“ O hills ! ” thus burst our song aloud,  
From all the voices of the crowd.

“ O hills that gird Jerusalem !

Even so where'er his people dwell  
The Lord encampeth—circling them,  
As the hills stand round Jerusalem,  
So keeps He Israel.

O Zion, hill of God !

Steadfast, thou standest still where He  
Maketh His high abode.

Yet he who trusts the Lord  
Abides as strong as thee.”

Now past we on in haste, nearing our rest,  
And as we went, each man to each spoke low,  
Of the long promise, long deferred, and slow,  
Of Him whose coming should make Israel blest.

The Lord, who suddenly

To His own temple should come nigh ;

O thou great prophet ! ere thy servants die,  
Shew us the hope of Israel !

Yea, it might be this very day

The priests of God could tell

Some echo of His footsteps on the way.

Thus went we on in haste, the boy and I,  
With all the companies of our array,  
With song and joyful word,  
To eat the passover before the Lord.

In all the records of the evangelists, there is but one distinct glimpse afforded to us of that marvellous and holy childhood, the wonderful time when "Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature." The direct and rapid narrative of inspiration which, without art, transcends all art, passes softly by that region of which the mythical philosopher or framer of holy fables would have made the most; leaving us only one revelation, one fact, in which nature and its common rules unite so strangely with the miraculous and supernatural—an extraordinary and glorious anomaly, but not contradiction—that we can but stand apart worshipping and wondering, well aware that nothing like this, so human and humble, so divine and god-like, could have entered into any thoughts of ours. From that home at Nazareth, of which no detail is given to us—of which we know only that Joseph, who was "a just man," bore the old supremacy as natural head and representative of his house, and that

Mary, mother, motherlike, pondered all the wonderful events of her son's childhood, and kept them in her heart—year by year the family joined the national pilgrimage, going up to Jerusalem to keep the feast, after the manner of their fathers. Taking no exemption from their miraculous circumstances, serving in humility, after all the reverent usages of the Hebrews, the God who had come so near to them, but whom even they, living day by day in his immediate presence, knew not in the fulness of the gospel as we do, Joseph and Mary took their way to the city of David to keep the passover; and with them went the child. Step by step upon the holy road, going “from strength to strength,” in the day's travel and the night's bivouac, singing those sacred pilgrim songs in which for centuries the Hebrew travellers had lifted up their eyes to the hills, and prayed for the peace of Jerusalem, Jesus, son of Mary, son of David, had his part. They sang around him on the way, of Israel's captivity and deliverance, of God who turned back the bondage of Sion, and made them glad as “men who dreamed.” They answered to each other in choral outbursts rejoicing in the Lord, the keeper of Israel, who slumbered not nor slept; but knew not,

in their human blindness, that in their company, and among their tents, He was there of whom they sang. As they went and as they came, many a strange thought must have entered into the wondering minds of Mary and of Joseph, whether this marvellous child was to restore again now "the kingdom to Israel,"—whether it was the climax glory of the house of David, the final universal triumph over all the enemies of Judah, with which the solemn future trembled before their path—or what else, in the life which was now emerging out of childhood, could justify its extraordinary beginning. Perhaps, as they returned, being but human people with merely natural powers, all the services of the holy festival had exhausted the minds and faculties of these two humble Hebrews; they thought He was in the company; for a whole day's journey they did not see the child; they supposed Him to be among the kinsfolk and acquaintance who were travelling down again, communing together of all the temple services, and perhaps of the mystic meaning of that paschal lamb—travelling down from Jerusalem among its hills towards distant Galilee. When they did not find Him, trouble and anxiety came over the minds of His guardians—they did not

know what evil thing might have befallen their charge, for whom they, weak and humble as they were, were responsible to His Father in heaven. They hastened back, as Mary says, sorrowing—dreading, perhaps, some wile of the Great Enemy, who might have interrupted the steps of the child. Where they found Him was in the centre of all the wisdom and learning of Jerusalem, among the proud Jewish doctors, learned in all the traditions of the fathers, but far astray from the direct simplicity of those earliest fathers who were taught of God, among the scribes, the literati, the intellectual classes, who were too much refined and too highly educated to believe in anything more than they saw. He sat among them doubly invincible in His divinity and in His childhood, bringing to those sophisticated and worldly philosophers that simplicity of which they knew nothing, the sublime and marvellous simpleness of the everlasting truth. While the amazed doctors questioned Him, gathering round the neophyte who was wiser than the wisest father of their fraternity, Joseph and Mary, hurriedly pressing into that learned presence, came suddenly seeking the child. Joseph says nothing, perhaps feeling then for the first time



that his heavenly charge was a world beyond his reach or authority; but Mary, who knew herself his mother, presses forward with that half-petulant half-joyous exclamation, "Son!" He was found, but she was a woman, and into her joy and wonder a half tone of reproof intrudes. They were wayworn and anxious—Galileans, though of the house of David, doubtless bewraying themselves by that same accent which betrayed Peter—and the company into which they came, in their haste and trouble, was of the highest of their nation, the most cultivated men of Jerusalem. But the Lord rose up—rose up being a child, out of the high discussion which concerned things holy and divine—out of His Father's house which He loved, and from His Father's business which He must be about—rose up without question to follow His earthly guardians, and so went away with them to overtake the men of Galilee, slowly going down, a weary company towards their own land. He marvelled half, as he had to marvel so often, how it was that they did not know what He had remained for. "Wist ye not?"—but having expressed that, the first breath of His divine lifelong astonishment, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known

me?" the Lord arose and followed them, passing away into the Galilean solitude, the silence which yields no sign for many years.

I have heard young people who were believers, or who believed themselves so, repining many a time against fathers and mothers who detained them from church and prayer-meeting. I have heard many a half-spoken suggested complaint and sigh of blame against the elder people who put curbs upon young devotion, and restrained the eager disciple, who remembered more that he was a Christian than a child. Stay a little, youthful martyr. This was how the Lord did when he was a child—murmured nothing—lingered not—went away out of the temple, where His Father's business was in His holy hands, to travel down the long road to Galilee, to dwell among the fishermen and peasants, and to wait till His hour had come. Sometimes our fathers and mothers, perhaps, do not understand us—as one human creature rarely does understand and compass the full meanings and motives of another—but infinitely less did His humble guardians understand Him. The Lord did not need to vindicate himself at the expense of Joseph and Mary—He made no com-

plaint of them for taking Him from this sacred occupation—simply He obeyed them, being what was far the hardest, holiest, and divinest to do. Perhaps we, too, might sometimes obey without complaining—sometimes be content to lose a privilege without consoling ourselves that it is some one's fault; and learn this early lesson from the Lord, that it is not worship, nor holy conversation, nor prayer, nor efforts for the good of others, which are the things under whose shield and cover we may hide our life; but that beyond all these is the life itself, the years and the hours, great and little, one by one, which have to be sanctified. Sometimes it is better to stay at home, and do what we are bid, than to go abroad and visit the poor, or exhort children to duties which are very hard for us, but which, we do not take time to think, are equally hard for them. Always it is best to make sure of all the homely necessities of the Christian life, the every-day and common-place ordinances lying close at our hand. This was what our Great Example did.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE TEMPTATION.

SPRING lingers as it comes. Out of the first hope of the New Year comes sadly lagging this gloomy February, full of chill rains, and snows, and winds. Nothing will make nature hasten out of her methodical and gradual course—not the leaves and the buds arrested in their coming—not those far more precious human blossoms, dearer than all flowers, whom the sun and the summer might perchance bring back to the life from which they were fading. After waiting for the snowdrop, there is a weary long time further to wait for the primrose—the days will only lengthen out minute by minute; and the hope of the year is almost as sad in the coming as in the going, as it steals along with those unkindly winds and vapours out of the east.

Yet the name of spring somehow quickens one's

heart. I like to stretch it to its furthest limits, and cheat even February and the east winds with this nominal distinction; but it is not difficult to learn this lesson, which everything else teaches us as well as the year, that God takes time to all the operations of His providence; that there is no haste, no impatience in the works of the Omnipotent; and that, from the earliest bulb sending up single leaf by leaf—a gradual progression not to be hastened—everything great and small grows and increases after this ordinance of heaven. In the impatient fretting of our humanity, we would fain have great revolutions accomplished at a stroke; but God never does so. It is natural enough perhaps for us, who would fain see in our own days the result of what we do, to chafe against the slow course of events, and do our little endeavour to hasten the course of nature. No matter—even in the simplest things nature avenges herself. The spring fruits which are forced for our luxurious tables, thin and crude though they be, disgust our fastidious palate by the time when their natural season produces them rich and sweet for all the rest of the world; and the small is but an emblem of the great. One great country, near of kin

to ourselves, suffers a daily injury and debasement because it abridges the natural growth of childhood, and finds its precocious boy a worn-out old man before he has reached middle age; we ourselves have begun to discover how fatal to our domestic comfort it is to trust in criminal reformation summarily accomplished. We are short-lived and short-sighted; we would fain do everything in a hurry; but even the material world and elements are against us as well as the usages of God.

But I think sometimes, as those lingering Sabbaths glide by us, marking week by week, through the east winds, and the fogs, and the hailstorms, how the year creeps on, we might very well pause to think how gradually God accomplished the greatest work ever done in the universe—our redemption. It might have been one stupendous act, terrific, appalling, sudden—and perhaps our vulgar human imagination could have conceived of such a spectacle—but it was not, in us to conceive of the sacrifice slowly accomplished, at the cost, not only of blood, but of *years*—long years, alien and exiled out of heaven—full of “the contradiction of sinners”—full of such a depth and extent of human blindness, that even the Lord

Himself—if one may say such a word—seems moved to a Divine and pitiful astonishment to see it. The lingering course of all that time between the birth at Bethlehem and the temptation in the wilderness; years before the public ministry of Christ began, or He had commenced to shew His love in miracles—years when He lived as a man lives, pitying, enduring, loving, yet refraining to take to Himself that power which could heal the sick or bring back the dead—years in which the common course of the world, familiar to ourselves and all His creatures, passed over the head of the Maker of us all. I think this is a very wonderful time to remember and know of—almost more wonderful than the after period when He was busied with the positive works of His Divine mission, and went about everywhere doing good. The evangelists say little of these early years, and they come little to our remembrance; yet it was in these our High Priest took His experience of the common lot—that day-by-day knowledge of all our trials, weaknesses, and temptations, which, we thank God to know, remains within His holy memory even in the highest heaven. I say again, I think it almost more wonderful than all His course of heavenly bene-

ficence, and all the labours of His public ministry, to think upon that time when He did no miracles—spoke no parables—only lived.

That was the seed-time of the heavenly year; and when we ourselves grow weary of slow days and uneventful years, lives which are filled with common duties and necessities, and are never startled into sudden brightness by anything extraordinary, wonderful, or great—and such weariness will come sometimes—it is good to think how the Lord lived in this very quietness, doing nothing wonderful, only the simple offices of daily life, and occupied himself for so many years in the common living of a man.

It is good to be young. Of all the natural and personal gifts of Providence, I cannot but think that youth, with all its follies and blunders, is almost the brightest. One loves it most, perhaps, when one has just got beyond it, and looks back sighing on the days that are gone. Notwithstanding, youth—the most prodigal of all spendthrifts—presses forward perpetually towards that busy way of life, where all its natural gladness has the greatest chance of being crushed out of it, and chafes at its preparatory days as we all fret at the cold winds of spring. Patience!



In this spring is another commemoration—a recollection which no one calls joyful, though its issues are so—for here we, who but the other day made our remembrance of the early worshippers who came to Him in His cradle, are called to think upon that terrible passage, beyond the strength of flesh and blood—the temptation of the Lord.

This was the beginning of that manhood which was to be spent for us in the visible ministrations of the prophetic and priestly office. Towards this time He had been living all these early years of quietness, and through this, as through a gateway, terrible but magnificent, He had to pass towards all the grand events of our salvation. It is not uncommon among those who soften down the reality of this gospel into a mythical and romantic story, to make this solemn beginning of the Redeemer's ministry an emblematical representation of the common initiatory processes of life. Do not think it so, you eager young champion, who suppose you would be glad to go through that agony for the Lord's sake. Not one man in a thousand can lay his hand upon one point in his own history, and say, "This was my temptation;" and never man in the world except our Sub-

stitute knew what that ordeal was. It is no emblem. As real as good and evil, as the power which destroyed the human race, and the far greater power which saved it, was that personal encounter of our Redeemer and our Enemy. We meet our temptations, stray imps of darkness, here and there wandering every day, besetting our path with many a capricious and painful variation, coming in upon us suddenly and unawares, vexatious and multitudinous as the flies in Egypt. Very seldom does it fall to the human lot to come suddenly to one great fight of afflictions, and know in it the grand ordeal and trial of our faith. So sublime a discipline is not possible to a nature which faints and grows weary so easily as ours does. Joy itself wears out the shallow soul of a man—how much more the sharp and urgent stress of such a long-continued agony! This, however, is a mistake we all make very readily. Agonies are not the common dispensations of God; and the unaccustomed young soldier, who vaguely hopes to find all the forces of the enemy embattled in one tremendous assault upon himself, is very like not only to be disappointed, but, in the real shock of the encounter, to fall before the unconsidered adversaries, the

light horsemen, prompt and unencumbered, pricking against him in the actual field.

So I do not think it right or safe in any way to speak of the great events in our Lord's life, as emblematical or representative of our own. We who have hard enough ado to fight the smallest of our own battles, and who unassisted could fight none, are but presumptuous if we take upon ourselves, even in idea, those great conflicts endured for all men, which would indeed lose their power and significance altogether had they to be done over and over again. The "Christ youth" of all these mystic human fables is but a human imagination, vaguely derogatory of the one Christ, who does not come again till the end, and whose work was finished on the cross. We are not "Christ youths," not the best or the noblest of us—but stand on an infinitely lower platform fighting our own little enemies, for ourselves and not for another, conscious at our heart always that these *are* our own enemies, and that we never get sufficient advantage over them, to begin the warfare on behalf of other people. This is always the terrible drawback of human reformers, regenerators, and saviours. Every real event in life thrusts us back upon the personal—we

never can get clear enough out of that little noisy circle of attendant demons who devote themselves to our private downfall, to fight our neighbour's devils for him. "None of them can save his brother." None of us so much as know, which of these black bands press our brother closest, or are his most special adversaries—and so we have no vantage-ground at all to stand upon—cannot fight the battle for a single soul except our own, and at the best can but shout out of the midst of the conflict a cry of "Courage! come on! God is for us all"—while we set our back against the rock, and keep off the enemy, every man for himself.

This peculiarity of human nature happens unfortunately for one of the favourite theories of our time. There are a great number of generous optimists who think saving one's own soul a very selfish and ignoble condition of receiving the gospel. If we could but receive the gospel without getting any benefit by it, there would be some credit, some beauty, something really worth trying for in that,—but to love good, not for the sake of good, but for the sake of one's own soul, is a meanness of which these high-spirited people magnanimously declare themselves incapable. It is ungenerous, selfish, an

interested motive—worldliness and other-worldliness, the one not less ignoble than the other. Yet somehow, put but the story into flesh and blood, make it the prodigal returning to his father's house, and straightway every human eye glistens in acknowledgment of that true touch of nature, so pitiful, so genuine, so full of pathos. Does any one suppose the poor spendthrift in that far country, bethinking him of his father's house, was mean, ignoble, or selfish? Nature says otherwise surely; yet doubtless it was for his advantage that he went home. What does any one suppose came into the wanderer's forlorn imagination when he said in that most pathetic self-communing, "I will go and return to my father." Was it only a full meal? No man who ever felt his heart beat in his own breast, dares think so for shame.

And when every soul finds out, as one time or another every soul must, that it is out of tune and harmony with all the universe around it, that everything but itself moves in a sweet concerted march with the great music of the spheres, and that *it* alone, a restless and impatient unit, feels, as an irksome burden, the golden days and hours which come from the hand of God—what then? Must we continue in our dis-

cord, our alienation, our disease, because there is no way of getting out of them, unless we consent to accept the selfish advantage of eternal life by the way? It is rather a sad dilemma for that magnanimous generosity which would gladly save others, but would prefer to leave its own well-being, with a lofty indifference, to chance, or the discrimination of God. Unfortunately, it is a first principle of our nature, that one must consider one's-self, in the first instance, before one can do the smallest benefit to one's neighbour. A man who is sick, however high-minded and unselfish, has to consent to get well, for example, before he can do anything for his children or his neighbours; and the common sense of the world would very soon decide how to deal with one who, crippled by disease, bemoaned himself over the selfish necessity of being cured himself before he could cure others! Kindly human feelings exist in the most debased classes;—but the repentant criminal who established relations with one of our reformatories, and bestirred himself for the rescue of his *collaborateurs*, while he himself magnanimously went on thieving, too unselfish to accept deliverance, would be a somewhat ludicrous example of generosity. It is indeed a common, well-

established rudimental principle in human society, that a man must place *himself* in a certain position before he can with any effect help other people. He must get strong, if it is possible—he must acquire education—he must attain influence: an invalid cannot visit the poor; a poor man cannot give employment and comfort to a district; an ignorant man cannot instruct others. Yes! it is true: take it into your full consideration, young philanthropist. You must consent to “better yourself” by every imaginable degree of selfish personal progress, if you would better others: you cannot give anything—money, or wisdom, or kindness, or consolation—unless you have first got it to give. Selfishness is an easy word to say; but it is possible that there may be a meaner selfishness in keeping poor than in growing rich. The prodigal might have been too magnanimous to return to his father—or too proud—which would be the better word?—and might have died, a pitiful, poor gentleman, among the swine, in the far country; but had he done so, never heart would have moved, never life would have mended, at hearing of his tale!

Nor does it seem to me that when this stirring

of uneasy and troubled consciousness comes into a heart, it has time for the precautions of other-worldliness, or can even afford to wait for what lies beyond death and the grave—that period which by nature we always keep in the distance. I think the stir, the pain, the eagerness is, if it were only possible, to be right *now*—to get out of this terrible estrangement this very moment—to be somehow seized upon and carried back to God *now*, without delay, out of this sad, weary, terrible life, which only is inglorious and melancholy, because it is out of tune with all the dutiful creation, and estranged from the Father in heaven. Death and the judgment-day, hell and everlasting punishment, are terrible words—but they are distant, echoing vaguely upon us in awe and solemnity—not, I think, touching so close upon us as to startle many men into an insane and selfish rush upon anything which will save their souls. The salvation of our souls presses with a closer necessity, aches into our hearts with a present sense of being far away, distant, alienated from God and good, out of tune, fatally discordant, a jarring note among all melody. This is what every man, one time or another, knows and feels to the bottom of his heart. It



is perhaps the only knowledge which we are sure never to miss, any individual of us; and if we were all immortal and sure to live for ever, I cannot see what difference, except in aggravation, this could make, in that sob of conscious alienation from God, which bursts from every human heart; out of tune! It is on everything within us and without, the universal sentiment of the human race.

And it is just this self element in the whole matter which marks the entire, infinite, and unspeakable difference between us and our Lord—which makes His actions and His sufferings our example, but in no manner emblems of our life—that life which, in its noblest development, must, by necessity of nature, bear a first primary and personal aim. By means of this distinction it happens that nothing in human circumstances can parallel the story of the gospel, by ever so faint a line. No man can stand in the same relation to another man, as that in which Jesus Christ stands to mankind. It is vain to make similitudes of human resemblance—because nothing human can resemble a work which is altogether divine. After so long a digression, we return again to the subject which suggests so many secondary

thoughts; finding in the Temptation of our Lord an actual occurrence of the most mysterious and solemn importance, and not a general type of the early initiatory trials which are common to men.

“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.” He had come up out of the retirement of His youth, away from quiet Galilee, which still remained unin-  
vaded by the troubled soul of the time, and perhaps on His way to Jerusalem paused by the Jordan to hear the preaching of that other child, heralded into the world by solemn intimations only inferior to those which proclaimed His own coming—John, who had also rested the days of his youth, and now was shining forth splendid as a comet, the morning star of the new dispensation. Among the penitent crowd who came by thousands to wash away, if that were possible, their sins in Jordan, Jesus stood upon the margin of the stream. The minds of all men were agitated and full of marvelling. They could not tell who this preacher was who spoke to them with the voice and in the guise of one of the old prophets, and they gazed upon each other with awe and wistful inquiry when he spoke of the One among them whose shoe he was not worthy to unloose. Who was this?

There might be many in the crowd who remembered that infant, long ago departed out of their sight, whom Simeon blessed in the temple. There might be women there who never could forget the infants martyred for the unknown sake of Him who was born King of the Jews ; but where He was, or who He was, though He stood among them, none could tell : neither could the preacher, prophesying, in the sublime blindness of that extraordinary gift, of One whom he himself knew only by the Spirit. John, with his spiritual perception, was startled, it would seem, by the first look of his Master—"Comest thou to me?" he asks, in a half-believing rapture of wonder, though he had not yet received the sign ; but when the sign was given—when John beheld the Lord, of whom all his life he had known himself the forerunner—there seems no time for any further communion. With the acknowledgment of heaven upon His mission, the Redeemer hastened forth, led by the Spirit, to begin.

To begin ! one would say it was a strange beginning of such a work, if one did not know what preceded it and what followed it : how an old promise, almost as old as the world, was coming to pass in that day, and how the old deceiver who had betrayed

the woman was now about finding out what he could do with that Seed of the woman, of whom all these ages long he and his powers had lived in terror. The hour was come. The depths of the unseen had moved and throbbed with a terrible preparation. Once more the fate of the universal human race, transferred to one man's hands, trembled towards a decision, which this time should be everlasting and unchangeable. Almost, it would seem, as if Satan himself had been permitted to choose the scene of this new trial;—not an Eden, where all the glorious and harmonious universe proclaimed over all seducing voices the excellence and truth of God, but a desert desolate and solitary, where in the arid soil and parched sky was everything to depress the heart and courage of a man. Of all the world whose safety hung upon the event of this time, not one solitary ministrant was here to remind the representative of the race, of those whose cause he held, or to soothe him with a spectator's sympathy. Instead, the world went careless on its way, witting nothing of the conflict; and by Himself, beset by all the powers of darkness, by Himself, among the dark revolted spirits who made the desert populous, stood the second Adam. They set

their strength against His, these arrogant rebels, long ago cast down like lightning from the flaming heavens; by and by the chief of them all made sole appearance in the scene, putting forth his wariest wiles upon the Lord. Adam, untouched by evil and unharmed by sorrow, in the early sunshine of the garden, bore a strange contrast to this lonely man in the seared and barren wilderness; but perhaps Satan beguiled himself in that very wilderness which, desolate and discouraging as it was, bore in its every thorn and sandbank a remembrance of the primal curse. Strange desolation, sadly different from the elder paradise! The Lord remembered what it was which dried into an oriental desert the sweet earth springing once with rills and streams. The Lord knew the earliest occasion of the brambles that caught His foot, and the thorns of which His own crown of agony should be woven. It was well to place Him there, where every human footprint that He made, testified of the curse which came because of man, and where every evidence of the palpable desolation was but another hieroglyph of sin.

When that great contest was over, evil in the world had learned the one sole lesson which it never could

learn before—that by whatever wiles it might interrupt the execution of God's gracious purposes, though it might raise the cross, and twist the thorns, and put shameful words into many a lying mouth, it never could, by all the arts of hell, put a moment's shadow upon the second representative of man. He went forth from the desert, silent as of old, saying nothing of His contest, only, as the Father knew and the angels, having accomplished it. Adam's sin, forgiven for the sake of this, came broadly out and stood manifest in the extreme refulgence of the contrast. Adam, who fell out of his innocence by one poor temptation, faded off a slender human shadow from the wonderful glory of this ordeal, which came because of his. For the Lord had already magnified the law and made it honourable—already into a divine beatitude He had received the precepts of the ancient Scriptures, and glorified them by His obedience. He had crushed the head of the serpent; henceforth the most satanic soul of evil could hope for no victory over Him.

And there is something singularly impressive in the very solitude and loneliness of this terrible scene, shewing how another audience, far different from the

men who were sowing their fields and building their barns, and knowing nothing of the salvation which was being accomplished for them, had a spectator part in all the history which we for whom it was done, but who knew so little of it, appropriate to ourselves. God himself had taken upon Him that part which it is wonderful to think man also has to exercise himself withal—"to justify the ways of God to men." The eager angels who were watching step by step how the Lord's pathway tended—the disappointed demons who beset it—those who had suffered and those who had beheld one terrible and summary chastisement of rebellion,—*they* had to see plain in the handwriting of heaven, how God justified His own dealings with the race whom, out of their sin, He saved; and this was what they read now in the divine silence, clearer than if it had been written in sunbeams on the very face of heaven.

## CHAPTER IV.

## IN THE DESERT.

POETS, in general, have been complimentary to Satan ; but if the Prince of Darkness is at all of a Miltonic mind, or resembles in anything his image as it appears in the "Paradise Lost," I think he cannot fail to be somewhat ashamed of himself in the naked breadth of deserts. Between himself and the poor human dupe, whom he cheated into rebellion, this is what they have made of it; and I cannot but suppose the Adversary, always concluding him to be, as Milton makes him, somewhat of a gentleman, with refined tastes and a cultivated mind, finds this an extremely unsatisfactory result of his exertions. For Satan, as some one says, is, without any question, a prodigious failure—the greatest failure ever known in this world, which he has done his best to make like himself, without—God be thanked—quite succeeding; and



when the intellectual fiend sees the shrunken soil parched as with his own hot breath, the wild rocks piled upon each other as in a very frenzy of nature, and the face of the once beautiful and motherly earth darkened with barrenness, covered with briars, and rich only in the ill weeds that grow apace, I conclude the devil himself takes little pride in his success. Yet the desert is a fit enough place for us, who are of the race of hope; here everything is a memorial of our first undoing—and, better than that, everything retains a solemn recollection of that time when the Lord regained for us, not our old paradise, but His own heaven.

And even in the old Lent long ago, the Sundays were feast-days; and there seems as good reason now, in our restored state, for taking pleasure in the wilderness as for taking pleasure in the trim garden of antique enjoyment; the desert, where Moses and his people journeyed through all that strange and real story, which yet bears symbols too; where Elijah the miraculous fasted his forty days; where John's young life was hid, "till the time of his shewing forth to Israel;" where the Lord himself encountered the adversary; and where, in after years, hermits,

who maybe knew Him dimly, yet who sought after Him, even though it were groping in the dark, made caves and sojourned;—all these recollections people the waste and barren country, concerning which, also, God has recorded the promise of a time when the wilderness shall “blossom as the rose.”

In the desert, where Horeb was and Sinai—where were the infrequent springs, to which the Hebrew maidens sang, “Spring up, oh well!” and all the miracles of Providence by which God supplied the forlorn millions of His people. We have other associations now with the present desert, which is more dismal in its long stagnation among modern usages and life, than it was as the appropriate background of Old Testament events, solemn and terrible; yet the Bedouin vagabond, doubtless, is a true descendant of Ishmael, bearing confirmation strong, in his lawless existence, of that old primitive prophecy which characterises his forefather; and I do not suppose that we, who have heard of it in our earliest teachings, and in our most weighty, can ever lose our interest even in the material region and land to which all these recollections belong.

And there seems a peculiar significance in the vast

and awful loneliness which twice received into its depths the trance and ecstasy of the inspired prophet, and once watched in trembling silence the trial of the Lord. The very external aspect of this strange earthly infinite of solitude and desolation, speaks so strongly of the difference between flesh and spirit, the small importance of all ordinary human accessories to the soul which approaches close upon the unspeakable, and has its converse with God. From these marvellous seasons of retirement, the world glides off like an unnecessary garment. Nothing, in all its wealth, can help the seer when he goes to meet the Maker of all; none, even of its more ethereal qualities, can support him as he enters into that presence. It is only the bare beggarly elements of the old earth, the absolute emptiness of his own solitary condition which we see, as the physical circumstances of the scene. There he stands on the dry soil, unblessed by rains or herbage, nothing living but himself between the earth and the sky; and there God comes to him into the desert—that desert which, after all, comes to be an emblem and sign of everything in the gospel, at once of the fall and of the rising again.

The wilderness of Moses was Sinai, “the mount”

on which the Lord awaited him. He was the law-giver, the appointed leader of a new dispensation; his was not merely the ecstasy of a seer. While the people, waiting upon the skirts of the mountain, seeing afar off between them and the sky the light which burned "like devouring fire" on the cloudy summit of the hill, began to grow familiar with its awful appearance, and by and by to beguile the tedium with plays and wise human devices, how to make out of their bracelets and earrings, a safer God than He who stood on Sinai in their very sight, Moses, hid within the exceeding glory of that light, was about the labours of his inspiration. The great and ever remaining canons of the law, the lesser precepts, all so pure, and many so tender in their god-like regard for the blind, and deaf, and lame, the beautiful economy of rest and labour, the years and weeks, the Sabbaths and the jubilees of the Jewish dispensation, even the ark with its cherubim, were there recorded in wonderful detail upon the mind of the prophet. Forty nights and forty days do not seem too much for all the precious lessons he had to bring down for the people, who were singing and dancing in their idolatrous festival at the foot of

Sinai; and not one voice of individual passion, of personal ecstasy, complaint, or self-seeking, finds place in the record which this meekest man of earth made of his wonderful privacy and interview with God. Thus came the law out of the desert, sublime, impersonal, with its precepts and its testimonies, occupied in a grand abstract thoughtfulness with the things, great and small, multitudinous necessities of men, for which it found abundant provision in the mind of God—and sending forth out of the covert of that Divine glory neither voice nor passion of a man.

Very different is the next figure which breaks the solitude of the desert. It is Elijah in the grand despair of a man sick at the heart of wickedness and falseness, coming to beg for the death which was not to be afforded him. He has seen all Israel go astray in the foolishness of their idolatry; his own life—that life which was invulnerable, though he knew it not—has just been threatened for the truth's sake. Perhaps he had hoped other things of his own country and people—those very people who, time after time, had beheld in his hands the wonderful power of God—and, in the disappointment and disgust of a generous mind deceived, his great spirit wearied and faint

within him, he had wandered here, to see if perhaps God would let him die. As he muffled his face in his cloak, answering the questions of the Lord, even in the awe of that presence, the human passion was strong and bitter in the heart of Elijah. He was disappointed, deceived, wounded beyond all endurance; already he had concluded in his heart that all men were liars—"I, only I, remain, and they seek my life." Even while God speaks, his heart swells with mortification and the bitterness of love aggrieved. Out of the midst of this second desert trance comes the voice of one complaining that he himself is the only man who knows the name of the God of Israel. They are all lying in wickedness, lying in darkness, given over to their idolatries, "and I, only I, remain, and they seek my life."

This is not by any means an unusual conclusion with God's servants; perhaps it is a feeling common to all who have attained a great height of spiritual or even of intellectual life. There are men of refined minds, by no means unfrequent at the present time, who seem unable to conclude anything better of the mass of their brethren. "I, only I, remain." It is not vanity in Elijah, who exclaims it

with the indignation and grief of a patriot, as well as a servant of God; but, perhaps, it is less simple now, when it is still so much less easy to judge the hearts of our neighbours. In either case it is a self-delusion. Though we know it not, God who understands us best, does not trust His grace to the single keeping of "only I;" and it is strange to mark the Divine calmness of that quiet assurance, overwhelming in its revelation of the narrow human judgment which knew no better—"Yet have I seven thousand men in Israel." One could suppose the face of Heaven smiling at the human fancy, and the angelic bands who stood by, turning to each other in wonder, knowing of those children of their Master, who came to his footstool daily and nightly, yet above whose hidden heads the prophet lifted his hands in bitterness, saying, "only I." Doubtless God has a great multitude now of unknown children, hidden from the sight of the prophets of this time; and while men are crying out and lamenting because only they themselves remain of the prophetic seed, the angels again smile, knowing better; and again, without reproof, in that Divine composure which takes no note of human petulance, the Lord remembers his secret ones, thou-

sands more than seven, who have bent no knee to Baal. But this voice of Elijah is the voice of the prophets, a perpetual outcry of testimony against us—a perpetual fearless reminder of the laws we have broken, and the truths we have disregarded. Freighted rich with the messages of God, these servants of His, man by man, have been found to turn, in vehement and bitter disappointment, from the people who would not hear them, and make against us a passionate and sorrowful appeal to God. That was well; but Elijah, who saw into the years to come, had no prescience when it was men's hearts which he looked into. God had given him no commission to judge the soul which only himself knew; and so it comes that the prophetic voice out of the desert is the voice of a mistaken agony, and that the prophet lost his power of vision when he chose to make himself the authority in deciding on his neighbour's heart.

Till the second Elijah came, the desert was silent as nature. No second law came out of heaven to attach a new sanctity to the eastern wilderness; and while the prophetic dispensation lingered on to its fulfilment, such another prophet as Elijah never brightened on the Hebrew firmament. Then again



came the voice out of the desert—not the measured steady accents of the law, in its balance of doctrine and commandment, curse and blessing—not the vehement individual appeal of the prophets, testifying against us that we would not hear them. The silence of the olden solitudes stirred with another startling and passionate appeal, but the voice of that vehement outcry was to us and not to God. It came, ringing abrupt and strange, like a trumpet note, from the lips of one who had no leisure for many words, and no time to be eloquent—"Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." The voice was an absolute, arbitrary, imperious demand upon all who heard it. The abrupt and rapid message struck upon the people like a blow. What was it? Who was he? He only answered with his cry, the burden of the desert, sounding out from the wilds where his youth had wandered, like the true voice of those desolate places—"Repent!" In this was all His mission and His history. In person, John the Baptist scarcely ever at all stands before us a recognisable man. He is "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." It is the only description which seems to convey any just idea to us of the place he holds in the economy of God.

And then, last and greatest, the desert saw the climax of the long story, and it is again among the breathless stillness of that melancholy place that we hear rising towards heaven the voice which is neither abstract nor passionate, the voice which at last pronounces in man's stead that solemn decision against the flesh and the devil which delivered us from their bondage. Where Moses paused to record his law, and Elijah, in the bitterness of his spirit, complained aloud of men to God, Jesus speaks. It is to do what never man has been able to do before, to put aside every suggestion of evil, to refuse all the skilful proposals of the enemy, finally to command him thence in contempt and shame, a self-convicted braggart and liar. Men had tried before, moved by the Spirit—partially, with great conflict and trouble, had succeeded before in keeping the tempter at arm's length. No man, in the name of the race, had ever bidden the ancient liar defiance, because no man had been able to do more than keep him at hard grips, out of vantage-ground in his own heart. But the last utterance out of the wilderness is an immoveable voice of Divine authority, not to be touched, much less shaken—"Get thee hence, Satan!" Steal away out of sight, you

poor cheat and trickster, who, subtle as you are, have betrayed yourself, in that last mad demand, of exasperated malice. Fall down and worship *you* ! The Saviour turns away in His sublime exhaustion with perhaps the only words of disdain which ever fell from His holy lips—disdain, it may be, tempered with a terrible pity for the fallen spirit. Get thee hence ! hide your miserable head, you who even from your fall have fallen again into this irrecoverable depth. For Satan, I suppose, is not always so wise as we give him credit for. Blinded by the terror of losing his last possibility, one might imagine he had forgotten all his wisdom in a mad paroxysm of violence and blasphemy, to which Jesus answers, for the first time, with other words than the words of Scripture, turning away with the terrible scorn which closes the scene—“ Get thee hence, Satan ! ” This was the great turning-point of all the earlier and all the later story—the crisis when it was at last proclaimed in heaven and earth that the history of man should be no longer one unfailing record of temptations triumphant and virtue overpowered—that the hour had come which turned the scale, and that at last One, who was found in fashion as a man, had

thrown off the intolerable oppression, and overcome the enemy.

The desert, where such things have been and such words said, cannot be a monotonous or dreary region to any one who cares to think of it; and for the desert of this modern time we do not need to travel so far as the old pilgrims did. There is desert enough in all the great towns of modern civilisation, desert enough even in the primitive and rural country, where green fields and flowers do not always act as moral lessons; and it will be well with us if we do not find bits of desert, Lenten days of trouble and solitude, through all our life. Notwithstanding the spring brightens through all those days of Lent. While we make our humiliation, the sweetest season of the year comes over the softening skies, filling with natural exhilaration the whole wide range of earth and atmosphere—the fittest order for this variable and wayward humanity, which keeps its Christmas when winter is at the darkest, and holding in everything that contradiction which keeps its heart alive, ordains its Lent in spring.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE CROSS AND PASSION.

CHRONOLOGY, with its arbitrary sequences of time, is not a science absolute in that calendar which deals not with mere days, but with memorials, fasts, vigils, and festivals, days of the heart—otherwise, were we carrying on the remembrances of Christianity in a logical succession, not even the ascertained period of the Paschal feast could have allowed the interpolation here, at the very beginning of our Lord's manifestation, of the great end of His work. But as it never comes amiss to remember that which is the ground of all our hopes—as every Sunday is a commemoration of His resurrection, which implies His death, and as, among all the marvellous and moving events of His history, none ever come so direct to our hearts, as the death which our Divine Kinsman accomplished for us, I think it is very well to put this gospel climax

out of chronology, to regard it as the great fact which fills all time, and to feel that it is safe to hold, in a daily celebration, that solemn festival of remembrance which holds before us, specially presented, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

I forget which of the German writers it is, who speaks of the characteristic distinction between the faith and creed of the Hebrews, and all the heathen beliefs of the old world—which distinction was, that while Greek and Roman looked at the past, the system of the narrow old Hebrew, despised by both of them, encircled the mighty round of time with a comprehensive grasp, and held a future in the bosom of the elder age. No star of coming promise glistened over the dark olive groves of Olympus, like that which shone upon the rocky front of Sion, where, among the ridges of the hills, lay waiting from the beginning of time, the knoll of Calvary and the garden cave. Jupiter and Apollo, even at their sublimest, gods of the poets, had already done all that was in them—and it was only the Jew, who, with the commemorations of his faith, combined a hope. The past, of itself and by itself, does not keep that living hold upon the human imagination, that close present

actual grasp, which a past connected with a future, embracing within itself all the strongest attractions of nature, holds through all time. Nobody now, in all the islands of the sea, thinks otherwise of Apollo or Jupiter than as the creations of a poet's fancy; but a tenacious and persevering race, doubtless held by that natural principle as God's instrument, cling to the old creed of the Hebrews, looking still through atonement and passion for the Prophet which is to come.

Which *is* to come!—we also look for Him stretching out our hands towards His appearing. Yes, one does not learn the secret of mortal history all at once; one believes in life with an instinctive confidence, apprehending neither death nor downfall, in one's youth. But when by and by the hour is come; when death looses the most desperate embraces of love as lightly as if that grasp of agony were the clasped fingers of a child—when one comes to learn that hope is vain, that skill is vain, even, heaven help us, that for this thing at least it is vain to pray—I think the eyes thus terribly enlightened, see with a different vision evermore. *My* child is here, safe within my arms; but God help that other mother whose child

even now He takes out of her arms, who turns her face to the wall that she may not see the light, and even, with the name of the Lord pressed upon her heart, cannot quiet the aching and the cry that is there! It is always some one's day of calamity—

“Never morning wore  
To evening, but some heart did break.”

We say these words habitually—but when we understand and enter into the thought, in the enlightenment of our own experience, I think the groan of human impatience, resistance, terrible reluctant compulsory submission to the fate which may not be evaded, is great enough, were it audible, to rend the very graves. But He is coming—presently it will be over, this hard apprenticeship, with all its privations; by and by we shall grow out of acquaintance with dying. Amen—Even so—come quickly, Lord Jesus! Without this I know not how, selfish as we are, being still human, with love and pity in us, among all those calamities, ruins, funerals, we could have the heart to take our own happiness, or even to live.

“By thy cross and passion.” I wonder if any one ever read those splendid adjurations without a rising of the heart. I know at least no one can enlarge



upon them. The bare statement, and that only, swells beyond the grandest flush of language; it will bear no expanding, no explaining, no making of scenes or pictures—that de cease once accomplished at Jerusalem. And the gospel, where the narrative stands plain without comment or digression, is the safest guide, at least for one who has no warrant to treat of the most sacred and extraordinary of all events, or to weaken the tale with a gratuitous version of imagined circumstances. But I think even the greatest Biblical scholar might be safe to trust the authentic divineness of the Scriptures, upon their own wonderful testimony. The story of all those troubled disciples in the upper chamber, with their bewildered maze of human emotions—their strange questions striking off here and there in dismayed interrogatories, catching a stray eddy of the stream—their extraordinary approval, “Now speakest thou plainly,” which we must almost conclude was spoken “not knowing what they said;” and among them all the One who was not like them, yet who, in His last words of love and counsel, seems to manifest, let us speak it reverently, a very human yearning, if that were possible, to take them into His Divine confidence ;

and shew them what they understood no more than children—the working of the great God's heart in His human breast. These make up a picture which, in all the records of the world, has no parallel, nothing which can stand at less than an infinite distance from it in all the memory of man. All the transactions of that wonderful night stand out with a pathos, a naturalness, an extreme and touching reality, which it is impossible to mistake or overlook. The sad midnight walk out to the garden, where the Lord, bearing in His human frame the sorrowful unrest of His beginning agony, went in the night to pray—the disturbed company left behind Him, the little group who followed to the very threshold of His retirement and slept there, finding no other refuge for the heaviness of their hearts—and He himself coming and going towards them, no longer calm enough for those long vigils of Divine communion which once restored the Son to His Father's bosom, making over and over the prayer of that soul which was exceeding sorrowful, and full of the great disquiet which could not rest. If He did not stand before us visible in that marvellous conjunction of the Divine and human, we should fear to clothe the Lord in these familiar garments,

though in the telling of the evangelists we recognise at once that nothing could have made His exalted humanity so sublime.

Meanwhile it was still the time of the passover in Jerusalem. Worshippers from all the ends of the land were still celebrating the festival of the old economy. Even Peter and John, drowsing in the heaviness of grief under the olive trees, did not know that all this was over and completed, and that even the law of Moses no longer required for its faithful fulfilment the slaying of another lamb. So they went on, accomplishing their unnecessary observances, making rigid ceremonial preparations for to-morrow's holy day, speaking doubtless with excitement of the great prophet who came out of Galilee, and so, surely, could not be, though their minds misgave them, the Messias. And then, through the winterly dawn, came the uproar of passing soldiers, and the fire was lit in the outer hall of the high priest's palace, whither the untimely tumult hastened. The grey of the cold spring morning was chill in Jerusalem—groups began to gather in eager discussion round the brazier. The popular wrath rose against the prisoner, whom the high priest called blasphemous. Yesterday they had

only wondered after Him and talked of His miracles, but this sudden change of circumstances took them by storm. He, whom these shining Roman legionaries had risen in the night to take captive, He brought suddenly, as if the case were urgent, like a man taken in a crime, in the cold and ungenial dawning, before the high priest—what could He be but a sinner? And then the tumult spread into the city, and the unreasoning tide of popular resentment rose; they ran together in their mad unanimity, not knowing what they were doing. It was the hour and the power of darkness; the hour had come of which Moses and the prophets had written, the time towards which, through His childhood, His temptation, his years of human existence and obedience, Jesus Christ had looked and lived.

I do not venture to raise the cross once more upon the hill. How it stood there, and in what company—how the Divine labour came to an end and was finished—we have all heard from our cradles. Words will not enforce the recollection, or increase its vividness. If we could forget all that ever has been said of it besides, and read the evangelists' account as if for the first time, that would be better than adding any addi-

tional description to the scene which we all know so well.

And I think it is good to put this, which is the centre point of Christianity—the grand event which gives sacred value to everything else, and transfers the whole to us, a sure and binding testament, lawfully conveyed according to the glorious jurisprudence of heaven—out of chronology, being in itself the embodiment of the whole gospel. I would sanctify the whole year through, among all other sacred remembrances, with sacramental days, shining full with the great radiance of the cross. “By thy cross and passion”—in it, as in the result of all, everything is embodied, and the memory of it comes fitly into the Sabbath-day, which in our Christian dispensation is the chief holy day, because God then declared His acceptance of the offering of His Son.

But I think the cross is something beyond talking of, at least after this manner. Explanation, description, illustration, are all misapplied in this presence. Over all history, into all institutions, and in every quarter of the world, its great shadow fills the earth. Every day of peaceful life which we live under the light of God’s countenance, every day of trouble

through which His great arm carries us, is a day of the holy cross. We do not need any further information about it. Heaven grant we only had grace to look up and behold what shines upon us like the sun for ever !

## CHAPTER VI.

## EASTER.

THE first spring holidays, whatever may be the occasion of them, are always grateful and pleasant to look on. For one thing, there is the sensation of escape out of the hard old winter's tenacious and clinging grasp, which would not let us go if it could; and as we cannot always be grave or thoughtful, there is nothing better than having good occasion to throw off the usual restraints of sober-suited life, and be happy as the creatures are, without investigating into the matter, or concluding whether, under all the circumstances, we have any right to be happy. In the outer world there is, of itself, a kind of resurrection perennial, familiar, constantly repeated, yet always a wonder—a resurrection, universal after its fashion, from the daisy on the meadows to the invalid whom the spring weather lets out of prison, to see it grow.

Something of universality, too, is in the keeping of these holidays—rich people and poor people, unanimous in the delight of the spring, are glad to make or take the leisure which can enjoy it; and the new year, springing light out of the old, with blossoms, and promises, and sunshine, and the thought of another harvest in its heart, might be more fitly celebrated at Easter than in January, when, but for the name, one would never know when one had stepped out of the winter of the old year into the winter of the new.

The dark side of all holidays and times of common pleasure is, that there are inevitably some who must drudge on throughout all, and whose unlightened labour lies all the heavier, when it shews in dark contrast with the common rest. If ever the public agitators of the question are able to procure the fortunate facility of breaking the Sabbath by Act of Parliament, this unfortunate class, involuntary ministrants to other people's pleasures, must be wofully increased. There are already in London a melancholy amount of people who find no rest on the Sabbath-day—people doomed to their common work, with this aggravation, that they do it, if not against their conscience, still in bitterness, as seeing



the whole world about them possessing itself in leisure which they cannot attain. But not to enter upon this question, it is the darkest side of every holiday season, that it casts us back upon the thought of a grievous margin of non-enjoying people—people who never find any leisure, and who do not know what a holiday is. Sometimes it is very good charity —better than almsgiving—to devise a pleasure for our unfortunate brethren who are held fast in this unlovely poverty. Though we should all subscribe to all the societies, and do our full share of the systematic benevolence of the time, I think it would still be very well to have a little thought for the brightening of the darker fortunes around us.

I have been told of a girl—I do not know her name nor her position, nor how far other girls might be justified in doing as she does—who not only helps with many an ingenious practical lesson poor little ragged-school children whom she teaches, but now and then is seen with a bunch of them making her way out to one of our pretty suburbs, to show the poor little town-born souls how the grass grows, and the dews fall. I should think it exceedingly likely that she finds them very hard to manage, and that the dews and the grass

awaken but few poetical sentiments in the precocious breasts of the daughters of St Giles'; yet, notwithstanding, I do not doubt these walks will grow green for many a year in the imagination of the children, and she will have her reward. We say it is not possible to exercise the kindly works of individual charity in this great wilderness of people—London, where we are bound to suspect our neighbours, and dare scarcely give a meal to a wayfarer for fear of admitting a thief unawares. We say so—perhaps in a great measure it is the truth—but when one wishes very much to do one's neighbour a kindness, one finds out the means and the manner astonishingly easy. Benevolence by system is a very good thing, and so is all the ponderous and indispensable machinery of modern charities; but I cannot help looking more kindly at the old usages of neighbourship than at the present traffic in kindness. It was better to hear of the uncles and aunts, not very rich themselves, who each took an orphan in—than to drive one's friends by prayers, coaxing, and importunities to the worldly polling-room of an orphan asylum, to vote for their admission there. The orphan asylum is a great advantage, but it is better for

a man to do his own duty to his own poor than to help in a public subscription, which takes it off his immediate shoulders—at least I cannot help thinking so.

Even in London, one can imagine that it might be practicable for one family which had something to spare, to take if it were but one other family under its kindly supervision—to eke out the scanty board with the crumbs which fall from every plentiful table—to transfer the little garments which the little ladies and gentlemen in the nursery had made an end of, to the noisy little swarm whose nursery was the street, and who, strong in the joyous riot of nature, were as merry as their betters, poor imps of hardship. It is quite possible that this quiet method of friendliness, which professes no profusion of charity, but helps where there is need, and where there is not, refrains, and which establishes direct personal relations between the helped and the helper—might do more for the establishment of a thorough understanding between rich and poor than all the condescending missions of the superior classes to the inferior. It is no very hard undertaking, in the first place, and does not seem out of the power of any one ; and when one looks around upon all the prosperous houses,

street after street, and square upon square, where all the household affections are kept warm and healthful by the constant stir and current of life, one wonders if each of these houses had a neighbourly charge of one other house in the hidden region of poor little streets behind, what effect upon the economy and the virtue of the district, upon the police, and the work-house, and the poor-rates, would come out of it by and by. I cannot but think, looking upon the mass of them how they stand together, armies of people, "of the highest respectability," in all the grades of wealth, from the "enough," which is perhaps most willing, to the mighty superfluity, which sends its lordly bounties by the hands of servants, and knows nothing of personal charities—I cannot but think that these same vulgar external channels, work-house, and police-courts, and poor-rates, would very soon shew a startling difference, did it become fashionable to use this limited and very practicable mode of benevolence, which, being no great trouble, it would be very well worth everybody's while to try. No one can walk through the streets of London, or through Manchester, or Glasgow, or Liverpool, or any one of our great towns, without being struck, if

he thinks upon it, with the wonderful amount of wealth—of *income*, steady, ample, and secure, to which all those lines of great houses testify. The number of them is as startling as the number of swarming children in the lower parts of the town; the one, to a superficial glance, does not seem to do more than balance the other; and I believe the one could balance the other, and poise the sinking burden upward beyond all speculations of theorists and hopes of reformers, would we all but try.

This digression is a long way out of Easter, yet perhaps not such a long way either, when all things are considered. Easter is the Sunday of Sundays, the concentration into one day of all the Sabbath sentiment, all the special Christian remembrances which make the Lord's-day dear to us, and seems the very time, of all others, to consider most how we can make up to our fellow-Christians the inequalities of external fortune. It is one great advantage of the country that it is comparatively easy to know those who want help most, and will use it most satisfactorily; but it is not less important, because it is more difficult, to fix upon one among the crowd upon whom to exercise what moral influence we may pos-

sess. I cannot suppose any kind of benevolence so entirely genial, Christian-like, and kindly, as that which one family, if it were so minded, could exercise towards another. Suppose a household, full in all the developments of life, parents, young people, little children, how easy it would be to find a match for it among its poor neighbours, how good to let every one do his or her device of kindness—a mother to a mother—a child to a child? Few of us can reach to a crowd—not many can leave the common offices of life to devote themselves to the generous pursuits of benevolence—but we can all be friendly to a neighbour if we will; and that is the old, primitive, original fashion of shewing charity.

Easter has always been one of the most joyous of Christian festivals. Upon it, perhaps, more than upon any other, the Roman Catholic Church has lavished its tricks of dramatic effect, arousing the ignorant with palpable representations of the sudden light and the Easter sepulchre; and still the Church of England, with a sobered ceremonial, rises up to sing its joyfulness, and proclaim aloud, “The Lord has risen,” with an effusion of melody and thanksgiving. The picturesque rejoicing of the old Easter

usages have given occasion to the poets for many a startling touch of sudden enlightenment; and "the Lord is risen" rings through the mists even of the great metaphysical drama of Germany, making a stir among the sage's dissatisfied visions, and moving the spiritual vapour over them. Use and wont hardens us wonderfully against the impressiveness of words which tell the very greatest truths of our faith, and I do not doubt that sometimes the sudden burst of singing, "Jesus Christ has risen to-day," might leap into a heart invulnerable to all the solemn statements of the resurrection. Everything that we are used to hear and see becomes familiar and indifferent to us; people say that even the carnage of war, the miseries of pestilence, death itself, and the habit of beholding it, hardens into dreadful ease and carelessness, those who live day by day in sight of those terrible evils of humanity; and a great plague which kills its thousands, instead of producing men, solemn with the thought of the death, which day by day they look in the face, produces instead, most commonly, a class of fiendish desperadoes, utterly irreverent of the mighty sorrows among which they stand, and throwing a disgusting defiance in the face of death. So

at least say all the stories of all the older plagues ; and it is a strange peculiarity of our wayward and capricious race. Nothing else could make it possible to listen, as many of us do day by day, to the wonderful narratives of Scripture, to understand and believe that Jesus died, and that He rose again, yet to yawn with suppressed tedium over the tale, which, if we had never heard it before, would stir us into ecstasies of wonder and admiration, and keep us hanging, crowds, upon the lips of those who brought to us a story beautiful beyond all the conceptions of the poets—marvellous in its Divine communications, and yet, above all comparison, true to human nature and the universal life.

Yet we grow familiar with the truth, and the familiar words fall lifeless on our ears, and we speak them over without a thought of the extraordinary significance which overflows them ; or, what is almost worse, make a great many descriptions of them in our own language, and try to din into our own minds, by urgency of repetition, some perception of what they mean, and should convey to us. On account of this human peculiarity of ours, a great festival, which makes a mark upon the year, and is attended by



holidays, and recollections, and national usages—hand-maidens of the more special service—must always have a great effect upon the common mind, and may often arrest the wandering thoughts, and quicken the failing interest, into something like a real perception of that faith which is not built upon abstract truth or general principles, so much as upon events and acts—a living, labouring, palpable existence—“the Son of man lifted up that He might draw the eyes of all men unto Him.”

For the gospel is not abstract. I think it is Dr Chalmers who says that for a false doctrine men have died again and again, but for a false fact never. That which Peter and Andrew, and Stephen died for, was the perpetual persistence of their testimony that Joseph's grave in the garden, where Jesus of Nazareth once lay, was vacant—that they had seen the stone rolled away, the grave-clothes lying on the cool rock pavement, and the angel saying “He is risen;” that they had looked upon Himself, their Master, who to the witness of their own eyes had been crucified, and knew now that He was alive. This was no doctrine of belief with these men—it was what their eyes had seen and their hands handled—they bore

their testimony with the force and weight of actual vision—not that all men should rise, but that Christ had risen—not an article of faith, but an event of personal and living certainty—and because it was true, and they had seen it, these witnesses took courage to die.

Throughout the whole record it is this fact which stirs into passion the slumbering rancour of the Jews. Of all the testimonies of the guilt of His murderers, none could be so terrible as this; and when Stephen, crying out, says that he sees the Son of man at the right hand of God, the maddened multitude, stopping their ears, run upon him in a frenzy of rage and terror. From the same statement the priests turn away “cut to the heart.” It is the burden of every oration made to the fathers and brethren of Israel by the apostles. “Him hath God raised up,”—they insist upon it with a triumphant repetition; and whereas the sermons of after ages abound most chiefly with the solemn truth that Jesus died, it is chiefly “He is risen again,” which is the pæan of victory proclaimed by the apostles, the supreme glory of their teaching. This was not the “doctrine of the resurrection;” the time was scarcely come for doctrines in that first morning of the Church—it was

the actual testimony of the beholders of an event apparent to their very eyes and ears. And the gospel itself is altogether such as this. Instead of an ex-cogitated system, it is a history, and its precepts and instructions verge all towards one person, whose words and acts, and motives, lie before us—to be tested, if we choose it, by the highest standard which we can bring to bear upon a matter which concerns us so nearly. It is not a test which would answer very well with men; the greatest hero, the purest philanthropist in the world—take his own sayings and doings to judge him by—comes shorn and diminished out of the trial. This age of biography gives ample materials to decide upon—here are poets over whose great fame comes a little cloud of self-revelation, making their own special champions smile or blush for the vanity or the self-importance, or the pure foolishness of genius—here are social reformers who live what looks a sublime life of universal beneficence, and in reality is so, yet who tell unlovely stories of themselves. In the Bible even, which is a succession of personal narratives, every man betrays himself; and from Moses and Abraham to Paul and Peter, not a personage in the whole Scriptures pre-

sents himself otherwise than we ourselves could do, with his errors open on his front—an undisguised man;—all save One.

Therefore the whole ground of the gospel is personal. It is not thoughts but things which we are asked to believe in. All the imaginations, mystical, ethereal, and intellectual, which disembody the truth, and make it abstract, are put away from Christianity. Mysticism is essentially heathen. There is nothing akin to it in the clear broad outline, rounded with God's exceeding sunshine, of that life which *is* the gospel. It is not to believe a certain set of dogmas, to receive certain maxims of conduct, to conform to certain rules, which is the essence of Christianity. Those who conclude so have still the very alphabet of religion to learn, and the first lesson is that of the little children, the plain simple look into some one's face who stands before us in an unquestionable identity—He who lives and was dead, and is alive for evermore.

“Jesus Christ has risen to-day.” I think on this day we might almost call the grave, all the graves, that abyss and ocean of every one's hope—“the empty grave of Christ.” None of our modern wil-

dernesses of cities can compare with that multitudinous assemblage, generation after generation, long ago lost out of living remembrance, who wait in crowds here and there throughout the land, till their hour shall come; and seeing how silent they lie in their full habitations, it is hard to realise that "sure and certain hope" in which some of them passed away. Yet that grave where they are is the grave where Christ was—His empty grave, a prison which has been opened, a bourne from which one traveller has returned; and the hope of the whole earth—the hope for which all the creation groans and travails, the grand restoration of all things, sends sunshine on this Easter of the heart. When we commemorate the One who has risen, let us rejoice over the hosts who shall arise. It is the resurrection, the restoration, the universal triumph—as sure in that pledge and first-fruit as if already the mortal had put on immortality, and our graves had opened before our eyes. Courage! it is Christ's grave, and He has left it. The Lord has risen! They are only waiting in the place where He lay till He returns for them—waiting in a sacramental rest and silence till the Lord come.

I almost wonder that the aspect of the judg-

ment-day, with which we are familiar, should be almost universally one of terror. To think of that wonderful and solemn tribunal without awe and a trembling of the flesh is perhaps impossible to any one. Yet it seems beyond the mind of man to conceive the glory and infinite rejoicing of that day. To wake up altogether as one sometimes wakes out of a dream, to find that there is no one missing, that our losses are but visions, that we are all here, every one of us, an unbroken race. To take up to us once again those well-beloved human garments, which it was so hard to put off, to turn rejoicing faces towards the sky where our well-tried Lord, who never fails us, comes in the glory of His flesh as He went away. I should be grieved to suppose there was any want of reverence in saying so, but I cannot but think of the end of all things as the great day of hope, the great triumph, the time towards which our heart throbs, and our eye brightens, and which seems glory enough of itself even if there were no eternity behind. Every day which commemorates the resurrection of the Lord, every Sunday the festival of His rising, brings to remembrance also the time of our own rising, the time of their revival who are dead. This day of

judgment, "the day of wrath, the dreadful day," what is it but our Easter, who belong to Him, and look to see His triumph?

Perhaps of all the events of the gospel it is least easy to realise and enter into the circumstances of the resurrection. We know sorrow well enough to understand its tokens, but none of us have ever received back our dead, and we have no experience to teach us the bewildering joy of an occurrence so unparalleled. All the human accessories are comprehensible. We can tell how the Marys went at the dawning with their wistful hearts, longing in their womanish heartbreak to weep once more upon the feet, marble-cold and immoveable, of the Master who was dead. We can understand the sore aching anguish of the disciples as they kept together, two and two, talking of everything, trying to beguile their grief with occupations, setting out early upon the road, doing what they could to cheat the dismay and grievous disappointment which joined with personal grief in their hearts. Was this the end? Was it over, this wonderful revelation of God? Was Jesus of Nazareth to pass away and fall into the common stream of murdered prophets, and the hopes which He

had raised perish like a tale that is told? Almost it seemed so; yet they waited paralysed in a vague excitement of recollections, not knowing what remained to look for. We can even understand how, in the great exhaustion and elevation of their grief, the women were scarcely surprised at the vision of the angel sitting there upon the stone. Wonder, curiosity, terror, all the superficial emotions, were long ago lost in this overpowering calamity; it did not matter to their heavy eyes who was there, so long as they knew that the Lord was not there, so long as they remembered that agonising cross and the cry with which He yielded up the ghost. In the hearts which ached over that appalling and unlooked-for death, common sentiments had no room; even what she heard from the celestial guard seems to have made no impression upon the bewildered faculties of the Magdalene. The words glided off her sorrow-stricken understanding; she wandered still about the sacred ground, hoping to find some one who could tell her where they had laid Him. "He is not here, He is risen;" but Mary did not heed the angel—could not comprehend what was in store for her—only wept, poor soul, because they had taken away her Lord,



and she knew not where to find Him. If she could but have come to that dead figure, which once was Jesus, and brought her spices once again to that sacred motionless head, Mary would have been satisfied; so little conception had this representative of humanity of what God had prepared for those that love Him.

And all the while He had risen! He whom they wept for as dead was standing outside in the dewy morning world, in that strangely solemnised and mysterious body, around which henceforward a certain awe and miraculous calmness remains; and out of heaven and earth the clouds and great darkness of His death and burial had passed away for ever. No one knew of it save the startled disciples, who had heard from the other startled women some wonderful confused rumour of an angel and an empty grave, which John and Peter, hastening on to prove the story, knew not how to believe. But He had risen—and the Easter song of saints and angels proclaimed His triumph before the throne of God.

This is our anniversary; where we could find another so full of brightness, so unalloyed by any trouble, I cannot tell; and it comes fitly in the spring when nature herself has burst out of the Easter

sepulchre, and everything speaks of revival, restoration, and hope. It is well to keep this feast; and it is better still to recollect that every Sunday is Easter, and that every workday week blesses itself with a commemoration of the joyful issue of the gospel—a day which it becomes us to make a delight, and set all manner of love and kindness in, like the Lord, whose triumph it was. Put away the tears and the darkness—it is the Lord's-day, the day of the Lord's dead, who, like Him, shall come again—the day of our own arising presently, when life and death are past; and he who does not keep it as a day of rejoicing, firm though his faith may be in Christ crucified, misses the gladness of that amazing declaration which “the apostles believed not for joy, and wondered,” even while they crowded together to call out to their returning brethren that the Lord had risen indeed.

## CHAPTER VII.

## IN THE GARDEN.

IT pleases God, who knows our weakness better than we do, to make wonderful provision for the shortness of our faculties, and the wayward character of our understanding. It is only men who make long sermons to each other, and force the thoughts of reluctant audiences into one persistent channel. We, who are not mathematicians nor reasoners, but common people, find it very hard, for the most part, to strain our minds, were it but for an hour at a time, upon any one subject. These unreasonable human thoughts drop aside from the sublimest current, which flows steadily, and owns no divergencies—run off far ahead of the slow argument which has to make itself into words, and are not to be led, save by something of their own nature, which goes at their own variable pace, and, like themselves, falls aside by a hundred

fairy links of association, enriching the general stream with constant change. A steady, monotonous, and persistent logic, is the most inhuman of mental powers, but it is only human teachers who make use of it. God, who knows the spirits He has made, knows the inevitable rebound with which they spring up from every place of distress and story of calamity. *He* enforces upon His creatures no bondage of unnatural consistency, but leaves them to wander, after the fashion of their race, from byway to byway along the sacred road. Though He leads us to the desert sometimes, He never keeps us there, but blends in the remembrances of His great redemption the city and the desert place, the marriage and the funeral, the garden among the rocks of Zion, and that other garden where the stars and the olive-trees saw the agony which no human eye could look upon. There is no book so entirely diversified, so rich in the change which is needful for human interest, as the Bible; and, from the more solemn and overwhelming incidents of the gospel, we are permitted to stray and rest upon pathetic and tender touches which carry on the same great story, but bring it home close and present to the weeping heart of common men.

Perhaps we might study this a little closer, in the religious writings and religious oratory of this time; how the pause is as effectual as the climax—how it is well to rest and lean upon our weapons, or even to turn aside, in a very absolute digression sometimes, till the tired thoughts take breath—might be a serviceable piece of information. The evangelists do it, because their inspired simplicity follows the event, and shews how it was accompanied, and how followed, in a natural sequence; and genius does it, because that wonderful gift of heaven has it from God to understand next best, after inspiration, how to tell the story and touch the heart of man.

So, from the cross which darkened the sky, and rent the earth in agonising sympathy, and from the resurrection—the most marvellous event in all the history of the world—the Divine story turns aside to shew a woman weeping in a garden, mazed with great grief, weariness, and fear, and incapable of comprehending even the words of miraculous comfort, which should have turned her sorrow into joy. Mary's tears have fallen, before this, in sight of all the world; but the world is lost to her in this lesser calamity, which suddenly aggravates and brings out

afresh the great loss which she has sustained. She thinks they will not leave her even the comfort of her Lord's grave. She, with her balm, and myrrh, and spices, seems to have had no thought of a resurrection—the best she can think of is how to do the last reverent offices of love, to cheat the natural corruption, and make even the cave, with its ledge of sepulchral rock and dew-cold floor, a fragrant place. One could suppose that she had accepted the cross and its conclusion, without the anguish of disappointment, which added to the pain of the disciples. She has made but little account of the failing of that hope which looked to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. It is the Lord himself she thinks of, and He is dead. Even the wild, sudden hopes of sorrow do not seem to cross the mind of the Magdalene at sight of the open tomb—not even the voice of the angel can rouse her to any wonder or inquiry, save the one on which her thoughts are settled. “They have taken my Lord away, and I know not where they have laid Him”—and in this new sting of privation and disappointment, she has almost forgotten her greater grief.

In the garden! This place, too, has its memo-

ries, its associations, a voice and a part in the great history. It was here that Adam entered, vicegerent of the blossoming world, when all was well in Paradise. It was here that he kept the trees of God, and ruled the calm creation, and saw the angels, and spoke with the Maker of all. It was here that God himself took Divine refreshment in that which, failing other words, the sacred historian calls the cool of the day, the time most grateful to our own human frames. It was here that the weak, noble creatures fell, the woman and the man together, and took their terrible knowledge out of the forbidden tree. Whether that paradise lies hidden among the hills of God, keeping vigil still for the holy morning when sin and death shall have their end—or whether the angel's sword went up into heaven, and the sacred bowers of Eden came to be common ground, no one can tell nor need speculate; it stands clear enough for ever, with its broken peace, the intrusive guilty passions which stole in, and the hapless exile after, in the Bible; and most of us, children of Eve, keep somewhere in our thoughts an ideal Eden, a retirement among innocent trees and rivers, where the sunshine and the winds shall do the part of angels, and evil

things fly before the natural breath of the country—the holy face of nature. Alas for the delusion! Eden did very little for Adam, though it was a garden of delights; and we carry our Edens and our deserts too deeply in our hearts to make much out of a change of external position, though we pine for that often, like a man in a fever.

It is strange, following life to its very core and centre, to find of how little real importance external circumstances are—even education, which it is so common to suppose can do everything, but which very often produces a result entirely contradictory of that which was aimed at, and sets the theorist aside like a fool. I know nothing in the world which is fit to be trusted in for the framing of human creatures. We can tell where our parents erred in our upbringing, but are powerless as the blind to see where we err ourselves. The boy who goes astray is just as like to be the son of a good man as of a careless one. Too much restraint, too much liberty, too much severity, too much kindness, are spoken of every day as causes of some fatal youthful bankruptcy; but we never know where to draw the golden line of wisdom, and do better ourselves. The longer one lives, the more one seems to



be thrown in absolute dependence upon God himself, and His personal grace; and every experience of our lives must make it more evident to us how little anything avails but this. Yet, notwithstanding, we all retain our halcyon ideal of impossible safety; which may be competence to those who are tried by poverty—rest to those whose prevailing devil is the bustle and occupation of the world—or, in general, just that thing which we have not, and which is furthest out of our reach. Yet it is a very clear principle of human history, that local advantage, natural blessings, a place and habitation even in the peace-fullest and sweetest soil of earth, has no more effect upon our contradictory souls than a child's fancy. Beauty itself, whatever æsthetical philosophers may say, turns out much different from a moral influence; and the man who stands upon the glorious Alpine heights, or gazes over the sun-bright ecstasy of a southern sea, is just the same man—no other—who went about through the toiling streets, and ached his eyes out over his day's work, before he came to those lands of the imagination to refresh his heart. The garden or the desert—let us take our choice of them—are in ourselves; and that garden where God

walked in the cool of the day, and where the day, and the soil, and the primal verdure, were holy teachers every one, is no longer possible to man. We, poor foot-sore pilgrims, have travelled too far out of Eden ever to come back to that innocence; for even in heaven, I suppose, we shall not lose the recollection that once we sinned—cannot lose it—seeing we should lose with it that remembrance which shall be the crown and glory of our humanity—that we have been saved.

The next garden scene in the Scriptures is one more close and near to our hearts. Adam, who sinned for us, though he was our father, is further off, and far less distinguishable, than Jesus who saved us; and Eden falls to nothing beside Gethsemane, where the tears of the Lord's agony consecrate for ever the holy soil. Here it is not God, in the cool of the Sabbath verdure, beholding all His wonderful creation, which was very good; but God in the night, when all the life, and colour, and warmth had gone out of nature; when the wistful midnight wind sighed chill among the branches—when all the unconscious creatures sought covert and shelter, and men gathered in their homes to rest—He, who could not rest, fell

upon the ground under those dark olive-trees, and prayed. Here, too, there were angels, the awed and reverent attendants of all His labour, strengthening the human heart with which no man could hold sympathy—which His own sorrowing companions could only gaze upon, amazed and wistful, but could not comprehend. Out of the innocent Eden, away from the early sunshine of nature, what a bitter long way it is to where this olive-ground, dark Cedron, glittering below the stars around, lies solemn under the awe of night!

And now Mary wanders about that brighter garden, to which the rocks of the holy hill of Zion have given a cave. The cave is empty, but that suggests no comfort to her womanish despair. One thought alone possesses her—and that is to find, not Jesus of Nazareth, but the body of Jesus, which Joseph brought to His rich man's grave. This is the last and uttermost spite of cruelty. They have taken Him away; and she turns from the white angel on the threshold with sore disappointment—finding no comfort in him—wondering nothing at him—unable, even in her languor, and excitement, and the sickness of her heart, to conceive of the great marvel,

unexplained to her, of finding him there. But she does not approach him to ask again—she waits for this man who comes along the dewy morning ways, who perhaps is the gardener, and can tell where He is laid—it seems all the question possible to Mary's heart and soul, distraught with her grief.

And He who approaches her has just come out of the sublimest conflict which ever has been recorded in language, has just overcome the universal enemy, and by His own will taken up again the life which of His own will He laid down. Had He but gone up now to that temple whose pinnacles glistened before them in the early sun; had He but appeared before that priest who, in pretended horror, condemned Him the other day as a blasphemer! the chances are, had we to fill up the gospel, this is what our hasty human fancy, solicitous of a climax, would have had the Redeemer do. It was not His Divine way of working; instead, He lingered in the garden to comfort a sorrowful woman—she who, unconvinced of angels, blind to all things else in her single thought of her Lord, could be lightened of her burden only by His own voice.

Oh, holy Sabbath morning—glorious Easter—gar-

den of God! I would sanctify, in its everlasting remembrance, the blessed dews, the innocent flowers, the Sunday sunshine, shining everywhere. Far away among the ancient shadows, Eden shines faint, a holy vision, in the mists of the primeval dawn. With all our knowledge in our hearts, we are no more capable of Eden; instead, here hangs this garden in the skirts of Zion, among the rocky slopes, which the pilgrims sing as they ascend—where stands the Lord arisen, meeting the soul that seeks for Him, saying, “Mary”—blessing every one of us, each by each, in the naming of our name.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE ASCENSION.

IN all the economy of this world—the order which ordains parents over children, and rulers over people—there comes a time inevitable and certain, when the ruled and guided must be left to themselves. The sons and the daughters grow into their own places in the world—by providence and the changes of life, or by death and its quick discipline, one generation has to go out of the shadow of the other, to forget the old dutiful lessons of submission, and take its own responsibility upon its shoulders. Even a nation educated for freedom, parts company some time with the king or statesman who has given life to its institutions, and goes on inevitably on its own course, leaving him or his grave behind ; and the most loving parent in the world cannot keep his child from the certain necessity of going on without him—of meet-

ing the perils of the world single-handed, and pressing forward by himself to his own fate. It is the course of nature. Under perpetual protection no man grows to his full stature, and the love which would save us from personal troubles, and bear all our burdens for us, if that might be, is not the wisest, and is prevented summarily one time or other by the arresting hand of death. We cannot resist temptation, or endure hardness, vicariously—we cannot live the Christian life by deputy. Out of the safe shelter of the children's home, the men and the women must go forth to make other homes, to do other duties, to enter upon the heat and burden of the day for themselves. This is hard enough sometimes, with its sundering of lives, and chilling of hearts, but the world cannot help it, and neither can the sufferers—it is a necessity of life.

And without this it would be impossible to test the individual fathom of any spirit; no one knows what a man can do till he is left alone. It is the commonest thing in the world to find, warm in the bosom of a family, some genius of whom everything great is predicted, yet who, when left to himself, never does anything, except leave in the faithful hearts of his

friends, a vague idea of what he could have done. In every household, in every school, in every young fraternity, from a college to a workshop, there is always some one to whom his companions and lovers attribute a quite extravagant capability, and whose real powers are only revealed long after by practical experiment, which often proves the youthful hero a very common man. We must all be left to prove ourselves if there is anything real to be found in us—even to let us know how little *can* be found in us; and until we do this by ourselves and unassisted, we have given the world no assurance of any real power.

This common principle of nature the Lord Himself took into the formation of His Church. It was not expedient, He says plainly, that He himself should remain in it, to cover over, by His own resplendent glory, all the errors of His followers, and give them but the easy practice of following His apparent footsteps. While He was here, little good, so far as the record shews, came of the labours of Peter or of John. They were lost in the effulgence of their Master's presence. Instead of apostles commissioned to the world, they were but the foremost row of the audience, the closest circle of learners, who hung upon the



words of the Lord. Independent action does not seem possible to the adoring followers of Jesus, who desired nothing in the world so much as to sit at His feet like Mary, and to hear His word. Yet it was His will to teach the world by means of these men, by means of these to soften the hearts of the multitude who had rejected Himself, and to bring in the darkness of the Gentiles who knew not God. It was the Lord's pleasure to shew the excellency of His power, not by miraculous appearances in His own person among the nation which had crucified Him, but by the "earthen vessels"—the apostles, who had denied Him, forsaken Him, and fled from Him, yet whom He still meant to exhibit to the world as bearing bonds and scourges, imprisonment and death, for His sake. Therefore, as they clustered about Him, amazed and sad, He met the vehement protestations of their love with His wisdom, which knew better. "It is expedient for you that I go away." Expedient for *them*—needful for the work which they could not set out upon while He was with them, overwhelming all their star-glimpses in the exceeding splendour of his sunshine—needful for the walk by faith which was to test their zeal and

faithfulness—needful for all the service which they could do in the world. Now they had to be left by themselves, to bear their witness of all they had heard and seen, to work by themselves under the Divine inspiration of that unseen Spirit who was their appointed Comforter ; but for the visible Lord, it was expedient for them that He should go away.

Thus, in the highest sense of all, the Lord took up the necessary principle of humanity, that principle which teaches us that the man who does well and overcomes must do it in his own person, under no coercion of immediate personal influence, and that it is when the Master is out of sight, distant, gone into the far country, that the servant's faithfulness can be shewn best. Henceforward even Christ had to be known no longer in the flesh ; their own instruction, their own affectionate acquaintance with their Master, had to be changed into a spiritual communion. Now that they understood at last what His mission was, their own mission lay before them, a solitary service, martyrdom and agony for flesh and spirit. They had to shew the world what manner of faith that was which could bear such men as they undaunted through prison and judgment, through torture and exile,

through the death which came on fiery pinions, cruel, violent, and sudden—a tempestuous passage to the final rest. The time had gone when they could follow in His steps, on the pleasant sands of Galilee, or through the hill paths of yearly pilgrimage towards Jerusalem. Now they had to make their painful way alone.

I do not know a harder lesson than this, even in its lower and entirely human aspect. To understand and consent that we, who have been brought up at the feet of fathers and of mothers—who have had familiar teachers, long known and dear to us, and a hundred tender and affectionate associations, connecting the future we had hoped for with the youth that was past—that we should every one rise up and go his way, following other paths, finding other homes, faring forth upon our warfare every man for himself—that one time or other all the kind arms of friendly support should fall off from us, leaving us alone with the world, alone to prove ourselves what manner of men we were, in the sight of heaven and God. Perhaps the aspiring mind of youth leaps upward warmer to the thought of such a trial—yet it is sad to think of all that has to be broken up and parted with—and

of all the change it makes upon the original institutions of nature—even though that change is natural—when those who once were little children rise up out of the shadow of fathers and mothers, and have to go upon their way alone.

This was what came to the apostles, in a more urgent and overpowering orphanage; for the world with which they had to deal was a world hostile, ignorant, and cruel, which had already done its utmost malice upon their Master, slaying Him with wicked hands; yet He left them to conquer it. The nation most enlightened, most prepared for the coming of that Messiah who was their distinction and glory among all nations, turned from His Divine presence, and words, and miracles, to swell the outcry of the rabble of Jerusalem, demanding of the heathen governor the death of Him who was born King of the Jews. Yet He sent His simple followers to win that very multitude, beginning at Jerusalem. If ever heart and flesh fainted, they might have fainted now before an enterprise so magnificent; and yet the Lord said, “It is expedient for you that I go away.”

It is strange to think of the condition of the apostles during that interval after the resurrection.

They seem to have gone about their usual occupations through all the extraordinary strain of mind and spirit in which the mysterious visits of their Master must have kept them. He dwelt with them no longer in the old familiar usages of former times; instead of that, He appeared among them suddenly, without intimation, wheresoever it pleased Him; and that very frame of manifest flesh and blood, the hands which He submitted to their touch, and which broke bread as of old in their presence, the body which was crucified, bore about it now a heavenly mystery, an awe which it is impossible not to perceive attending every appearance of the Lord. They speak together in their wonder, their faith, and doubt, and wistfulness—gathering with closed doors, lest the spies of the temple break in upon their consultation—and lo, He is in the midst of them! The wanderers towards Emmaus burst in suddenly upon their first bewildered assembly, and tell how He met them on the way; and when they look up, He is there. Yet they went fishing after they had travelled down, at His bidding, to Galilee, and met Him on the coasts where they had met Him first, as they laboured on the waters of their native lake. They were poor

men, and had to live; but how they lived, and did their humble work, in the midst of these extraordinary visits, it is not in human imagination to tell. No doubt it was absolute, bare simplicity, the temper of children, which by God's grace brought them through.

They had to be convinced all of them, even that practical and hard-headed Thomas, who loved demonstration; and it was not till that was fully done that their Lord led them out on the way that led to Bethany—led them as He had led them often, by the road where the blind men sat and cried in their vehement importunity—where the fig-tree withered, still owning no revival in the spring—and at the end of which Mary and her sister and Lazarus kept the holy house in which He had been a guest. Perhaps they thought He was but going there again, as He had gone so often—once again they followed Him, a wondering group behind and around, taking wistful note of every step He made. He was not going to Bethany—He was going beyond the everlasting doors lifted wide to let the King of glory in—going away, because it was expedient for them. I think the very hearts out of their human bosoms must have gone up with that

ascending form—they stood upon the hill without a word, gazing, gazing, if it were possible, to see into the inaccessible splendour of that light—men entranced, knowing nothing except that before their very eyes, their Lord, their Friend, the Kinsman of their hearts had gone away into His everlasting kingdom. Then a voice broke upon the charm of silence, drawing down those wistful, unwilling eyes once more to sights and sounds of the common day—not of the common day, for the men who spoke were in glistening garments, the perpetual spectators, once more visible, of that wonderful history—“Ye men of Galilee!” Though it was the voice of an angel, it broke the trance of their exaltation; they turned at the word and went away to the upper chamber, the lodging at Jerusalem, coming down silently from the heavens to which He had returned, to the earth out of which He had departed—and perhaps did not break silence till they came to that gray, common, familiar place again, and looking into each other’s faces, pale with the glory of the parting, listened to Peter’s tremulous oration, as, full of that thought, and that only, he bade them choose another “witness” to fill up the betrayer’s place. Henceforth this was their work and

service, the only thing worth living for in the world from which the Lord had gone.

From this time forward the first teachers of the Church seem to realise fully their own position and duties, and to understand at last the office of their Lord. Now they were left responsible, His representatives, in the dark world which lived and died around them—they took no time to consider of that, but entered at once with their moved hearts upon their necessary preparations; henceforward they drew no more nets in the waves of Galilee; the time was come for which He had called them—they had now to become fishers of men.



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE DAY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THERE is no principle in the world of more universal application than that old sad saying, One sows and another reaps. It is the common rule of all reformations, ameliorations, of all the greatest works of man—one generation spends itself wildly and with a very extravagance of patriotism for the country, in which the next generation calmly, and with no war but that of words, builds up its reforms and triumphs of freedom, recognising itself as the deliverer. The same thing applies universally to almost everything in the world which is worth working for. Even in very small matters indeed, practical pursuits of industry, of which one might suppose the obstinate human understanding could appreciate the use and purpose at less cost than a lifetime, matters of a loom or a furnace, pieces of silk or of pottery, the common rule

applies. Even an invention is nothing till we can understand that it has worried and wearied out the life of its originator, and brought him, the hapless familiar spirit which should have made him rich, to a bitter and discontented poverty, or a death of petulant disappointment. Then we begin to wake, and look after the machine, which has thus far earned a claim upon our consideration, by killing or ruining one of our brothers. And the law which applies even to these, is absolute in all things intellectual, in all things spiritual. It would almost seem as if in the strange vagaries of our nature, or in the common consciousness of the race, no truth was ever really acceptable to us, which was not somehow attested by the shedding of blood. In the Church it is the passionate age of agonies and martyrdoms—the age when persecution makes wise men mad, and when, in the fire and in the fight, men are not so dainty of their words as we are, but say what they mean, being truth, in that plain fashion which looks warm and harsh to their descendants who dwell at ease—which overturns from the necks of God's people the artificial yoke of worldly tyranny, and smooths the way for ecclesiastical disciplinarians, and the quiet jurists of the faith.

The man who hoards up treasures for a spendthrift heir, is the most hackneyed and worn out of illustrations; but suppose there be neither miser nor spendthrift in the question, the father toils and the son enters into his labours—one generation, hard and deep in its own tears and blood, lays the foundation, and another generation builds thereupon.

Sitting by the well amid the fertile slopes of Samaria, seeing the fields round Him whiten to the harvest, and pondering over them with that Infinite eye which saw the whole in one glance, our Lord himself applied this rule to the history of the Church. His thoughts were with His ancient servants long ago departed out of this field of God—with Isaiah, vehement and full of indignation, “Who hath believed our report?”—and Jeremiah, weeping for the unbelief of his people—and ghostly Ezekiel, making his own weird person a sign to them, because they were deaf to the words of his prophecy. He beheld them all standing eager on their cliffs and peaks of foresight, straining their eyes into that future of which they prophesied, searching into the meaning of their own mysterious words. He saw their righteous souls vexed within them at the stumbling, hard-headed narrowness

of that unconvincible people—and how their hearts yearned forward to the time of the Deliverer, whose day they desired to see, but could not. All their early toils in that laborious harvest, all their gradual dropping, slow and painful, of the celestial seed, all the wintry spring of their endeavours, to which no harvest came—the Lord thought upon them as He sat in the evening sunshine watching His disciples, how they came through the whitening harvest-fields. Here were those uninstructed men, who still did not know what His mission was, and would not know it, till they saw it accomplished before their very eyes—those fishers, full of vague ideas of restoring the kingdom to Israel; yet they were to enter into the labours of all the gifted prophets and princely sages of the old dispensation; what Abraham and Moses could not see, was to come under the very hands of Peter and John—and instead of the cry of old, “Who hath believed?” all Jerusalem should sway before these Galileans as before the wind, pricked to their hearts; and from the official heathens, great in the reflected glory of Cæsar’s Gentile empire, to the vivacious Grecian populations of Corinth and of Philippi, all the world should stir to the voices which knew no

language and no wisdom, except their provincial Hebrew, and their contracted Jewish lore. So it was—one man soweth, and another reapeth; the crown of the seed-time was not yet, till He himself, the Seed of the woman, should die to make the world alive; and then after all that wonderful array of labourers—after Himself the Infinite and Everlasting—after two thousand years of preparation and prophecy, the sickle should be put into the harvest; and these untutored Galilean peasants should bring home the sheaves with joy.

It is a strange reflection to pause upon. Patriarchs, priests, kings, and prophets—a long vista, stretching backwards to the verge of Eden—had looked towards this time with expectation, but never had been able to reach to it. One dispensation had followed another, and still the fulness of time had not come; but now in this age, which the disciples fondly called the end of all things, at last the holy year had arrived. Sitting by Jacob's well, in the very midst of the Holy Land, the Lord recalled the servants who had been faithful to Him of old—one man soweth, and another reapeth—only His own most wonderful example was wanting to complete this truth.

For, in all the New Testament, there is no record of any such conversion attending the personal ministry of the Lord, as that which inaugurated the public preaching of Peter, when the unanimous three thousand were "pricked to the heart." In the presence of that greatest of all miracles—His own person and words—even in sight of greater wonders than any which had yet attended the early manifestations of the apostles—the awed and wondering multitude stood uncertain, asking among themselves, "Can Messias do greater works than these?" Sometimes, in a sudden paroxysm of conviction, they strewed branches in His way, and hailed His approach with shouts; but, for the most part, changed and fluctuated through all His comings and His goings, and remained always doubtful whether to crucify Him, or to take Him by force and make Him a king. But no sooner had He disappeared from the troubled scene of that Jerusalem, no sooner had the mad caprice of the nation invoked His blood upon its head, than the sudden uproar sank into a tremulous calm, waiting what should follow. And when Peter followed—spokesman of His little band of "witnesses"—speaking, in his blunt and plain language,

of Him whom they had murdered, and whom God had raised up, the crowd fell like one man before his words. He was a simple man, speaking with no eloquence, only with the formidable directness and brevity of truth; but at last the long sowing time had come to fruit—other men had laboured, and he had entered into their labours—the time of the new dispensation had come.

It is often said that we neglect to give to the Eternal Spirit, God the Holy Ghost, that personal glory and worship which is all we can render to the “Lord and Giver of Life;” but we forget, when we say so, that the errand of the Comforter is one of a special and particular character, and does not concern His own glorious goodness in relation to us, so much as the goodness of Jesus, who in our redemption bears the chief place. The Spirit was to bring all things to their remembrance—to “take of mine and shew them to you”—to carry on, in His own sacred, unrevealed, invisible person, but in the name of the Lord, the work which He had left upon earth. Not to prompt us to gracious thoughts of Himself, but to a remembrance of the Redeemer, is His beneficent mission; and to grieve Him, and sin against Him, is

to resist this teaching and Divine influence, which, as the Lord describes it, is entirely concerned about the leading truths of redemption. In the economy of our salvation, the Holy Spirit, an unincarnate God, is the representative of the God incarnate, now removed in bodily presence to the heavens; and I think we do not need to fear, when we worship God in Jesus Christ, that the Holy Sanctifier, Teacher, and Comforter, would have us render to Him, out of Christ, a separate worship.

Whitsunday stands, in the English calendar, as the special day of the Holy Spirit. It is the commemoration of that visible coming for which the Lord had bidden His followers look—that solemn preparation for the work before them, without which they, human and feeble, might not venture to begin. Heretofore there are few distinct and individual references to the third person of the Trinity. He descended at the baptism of the Lord, and abode upon Him; He led up the Divine Beginner to the wilderness; and in that last solemn hour after the Supper, the Lord, who would not leave them comfortless, promised His coming to His distressed disciples. How far their unenlightened minds under-



stood the meaning of the promise, it is impossible to tell; but after the resurrection, the Master returns again to the subject, giving it definite force and distinctness. With His tender thoughtfulness, He arranges even the circumstances of the new and wonderful gift of God. They are not to scatter again to common occupations; the bond of their communion, drawn closer than before, is to unite them for ever. They are not even to go down to Galilee, to their own quarter; but here, in Jerusalem, where He was crucified—here, where the chief of Jewish law, learning, and authority, still holds its pragmatical place in the courts of the temple, and where the crowd of Hebrew worshippers repair from all the scattered colonies of Jews and proselytes, and from all the tribes at home in Palestine—here, in the centre of their nation, and in the scene of the Lord's death, they were to wait together for that Comforter, before their work began.

And it is strange, when we remark it in those brief, full, closely-woven narratives of Scripture, to observe how entirely the sacred chroniclers pass over that weary lapse of days, those times of anxiety, waiting for an event, which are often the hardest times in the common annals of our life. There is

little speculation in those records. The holy writer tells the events of the time before him ; and, in their close succession and quiet tale, we fail to recognise the years or the hours which interpose between ; and one could almost suppose that, from the parting on that holy hill of Olivet, to the Pentecostal blessing, the disciples went without the interval of even a day.

This gives a wonderful force to the thread of sacred history, which is not disturbed by any descriptions, or reflections, or digressions, such as swell a little life, in our days, into volumes of book-making. One might well suppose that nothing in our modern experiences could equal to our interest a dramatic description of the feelings and expectations of all those anxious apostles waiting in Jerusalem, keeping silence, looking for the mysterious and unknown Comforter who was to come ; but of all this the narrative says not a word. It is a very usual thing to say now-a-days, that, of all things in the world, there is nothing so attractive to men as the life of a man ; that one does not need to embellish that, or to smooth it for the popular eye, but that in its plainest fashion and most particular details—so openly displayed, that one may see the very rising of his heart and shaping

of his thoughts—a human creature's full authentic history is, to all other human creatures, the thing most interesting. A certain degree of truth is, of course, implied in this, but it has been too often put to experiment to leave us uninstructed in its fallacy. Shapings of thoughts are very well among the incidents of a life—but to fill up volumes with these inarticulate examples of human vanity is a very unedifying performance; and one cannot read those bulky biographies—great tomes, with great names upon them, chronicling page after page where a man dined, or walked, or held a passing conversation—without heartily longing to reverse the modern doctrine, and say that, in reality, nothing was so tiresome to men as the bit-by-bit detail of a small individual creature peculiarly gifted in some one particular, but in all others totally without distinction from other men. If we were to record events only, or the words and thoughts which shape events, biography would shrink wofully out of its present fair proportions, though how far we should be the worse for that it is difficult to tell.

For I do not know what description could do anything but weaken the forcible picture of these apostles,

as they appear in the book peculiarly appropriated to them. Detail does not seem needful here, and the bold and broad outline stands out before us full of individuality not to be mistaken—so marked and decided, that it is easy to know, by half-a-dozen words of any speech, which is the speaker; and no uncertainty is in the record. I have heard people speak as if it were a kind of profanity to bring our books and works of literature to this comparison of Scripture, but it seems strange that it should be so, seeing that we find in Holy Writ the highest test for everything, and that books after all, poor though they may be, are among the most important works of our hands. Certainly we cannot write as Luke did, when under the holy inspiration he wrote his Acts of the Apostles, for we lack not only that supernatural influence, but the great events with which he has to deal. Notwithstanding, it would be very well for us, both in a spiritual and intellectual view, and a remarkable advantage in point of art, did we bring our literary standard, as well as our moral, a little nearer to the character of these holy histories which chronicle the beginning of our faith.

When they had parted from the Lord, the apostles

returned to Jerusalem; they were to “tarry” there as He had said. He had left them to enter that wonderful reaping field of which the furrows had been ploughed and the clods broken, long before they were born—the harvest, on which as yet they had bestowed no labour, but which God’s pleasure was that they should reap. But they were not prepared for their warfare. Peter repentant, forgiven, and strengthened, was still the same Peter as he who vowed to die with his Master, and then denied him. They wanted still the courage which could be daunted by no peril, the utterance which no training had ever taught them. They remained still in the city by themselves, among all its crowds; they, the witnesses of their Lord’s resurrection, were dumb and held their peace, refraining themselves, till perhaps, like David’s, their hearts had well-nigh burst. Now, at last, they knew themselves, how inadequate they were for that wonderful mission—they were the Lord’s “witnesses”—they seem, even in their own thoughts, to have given themselves no other title; and in humility and awe, like children, they waited for the promise which He gave.

It was Pentecost—a feast of gladness—the holy harvest-home of the theocratic nation. From the

furthest boundaries of the tribes, the far outlying families on the skirts of Lebanon and by the shores of the great sea—from imperial Rome, and waning Egypt—from the desert and from the islands, the crowds came up “to the testimony of Israel.” “Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven,” were at Jerusalem. They were gathered, a very harvest-offering, the handful of first-fruits from many a distant region. But Pentecost after Pentecost, for years, they had come and gone carrying no wonder with them out of the city of God. What was to befall them now?

The apostles were together in one place, knowing as little as the strangers did what was to come; then in a moment their eyes were lightened; by the visible mark on every apostolic head, each man knew that his brother’s mouth was opened—that his brother’s soul was filled—that the Comforter was come. They arose in their solemn ecstasy, possessed by the Spirit. The time of their vigil was accomplished. Each man heard from his own astonished lips the languages of the Gentiles, the other tongues of this special and extraordinary endowment. It must have been a rare gift in Jerusalem. As the rapture and Divine af-

flatus came upon them, some of the little company must have hastened out to tell the news in the city. Immediately the multitude came together; it was wonder enough to rouse any multitude; and the strangers in Jerusalem, men of many and divers nations, men, perhaps, who knew only enough of Hebrew to do their half-instructed worship, and to whom the sound of their own tongue was like water in the desert, came thronging to hear the words which every man understood, in the language of his home. Perhaps, not one Pentecostal worshipper but had heard, as a stranger hears, of Jesus of Nazareth; God took them unawares in the softening of their hearts; they stood together a mixed and various crowd, every man, one does not know how, hearing in his own tongue; and what came home to them in those mother accents was the name of Jesus, the wonderful story of that resurrection of which these men were witnesses. Whether God revealed to those strangers the outward tokens of the Comforter's presence, which were seen by the apostles, we cannot tell; but at least the strange, agitating, glorious wind of Divine inspiration was in some manner perceptible to the audience, for Peter finds it necessary to make a solemn

and extraordinary explanation of the new event, before he turns to his real tale. The times have changed. Here is no longer occasion to cry, "O fools, and slow of heart"—no longer opportunity for the grieving prophet to withdraw himself to the desert, and say, "I, only I, remain." The seed-time long and slow, the tears of saints, the blood of the Son of God, have done their work upon the tardy soil. While the apostle speaks, the stirred heart moves within the multitudinous bosom of the crowd. All their human obstinacy is not fit to stand before that unseen God, moving upon the chaos of their ignorance and weakness. With a burst and flood like a torrent, the moved soul breaks from all its common barriers. It is instant compunction, instantaneous conviction—a faith which can scarcely be called faith, so real and actual is it. "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And so what the Lord himself did not accomplish, what prophets had toiled and sighed after in vain, the Holy Ghost, with the Divine breath of His invisible power, completed in a moment. They were "pricked to the heart;" the Divine, irresistible truth constrained them; they fell, like one man, at the foot of the crucified—the Pentecost and harvest-offering—God's



handful of first-fruits, gathered not from the Judean fields, but from all the nations of the earth.

This was the visible beginning in the visible Christian Church of the special work of the Holy Spirit—that work to which we owe all the glorious progress of the gospel—which has moved nations like single men, and given to a solitary preacher strength more than embattled armies. Since then, without intermission—sometimes in a baptism of fire and mighty rushing wind, like the inspiration of that Pentecost—sometimes like the unnoticed dew, falling morning and evening on the tender blade and bud of humble faith; sometimes with a miraculous, extraordinary agitation, moving the hearts of multitudes—sometimes stirring within an individual bosom in those longings after God and His truth, in those inarticulate motions of self-perceiving, uneasy disgust, and impatience with our own sins, which rouse the sloth of human nature—this glorious worker has pursued His office. And when we, who are only too well satisfied with our own poor limited ways and thoughts, wake up suddenly to behold with terrible unrest and discontent on what poor mocks we spend our life—when the very heart goes out of our labouring breasts in a

sudden access of heavenward longing, inexpressible, and not to be weakened with words—hush, keep silence!—it is not we—it is the Lord!

It almost seems as though this visible appearance of the Comforter was not confined to that one memorable day, for when Peter stands in the house of Cornelius among the anxious little company of Gentiles, come together to hear what supernatural message this Hebrew, summoned by angels, had to bring to their souls, while he “yet speaks,” they of the circumcision—Peter’s companions—are suddenly aware that the Holy Ghost has fallen upon this company. The oration of the apostle comes to an abrupt conclusion. There is here a mightier preacher; and forthwith Cornelius, who a little while ago fell down upon the threshold of his house to worship Peter—and all his heathen kinsmen, wistful searchers for other gods than those of Olympus—are startled into spiritual life as high and wonderful as that of the very apostles, and, speaking with tongues, magnify God. The Spirit comes no longer in those miraculous manifestations. Preachers of the Christian faith no longer cease suddenly from instruction or appeal because they can perceive how the Holy Spirit—supreme instructor!—

has fallen upon their audience; but His works are not less miraculous because they are less manifest. These days of ours—civilised, Christianised, peaceable days—in which the world has much conformed itself to the Church, and the Bible has sent a subtle breath of half-perceptible influence through all the languages of Christendom—these days, perhaps, more than the ages of miracles, persecutions, and martyrdoms, are the Church's days of trial. To keep fresh and living the truth, which wears into perpetual familiarity, and preserve the spirit throughout the babble of words—to remember that this is no tale of devout imagination, visionary and symbolic, but an actual occurrence, the beginning of days for us, the dawn of this dispensation of the gospel—these, perhaps, are harder in their fashion than it was, supported by extraordinary revelations to meet extraordinary dangers; and God knows what miserable failure we should make in the midst of all our noise of profession, if the benign and everlasting Spirit, bearing with our folly, did not move upon the waters, breathing a Divine discontent into soul and spirit, and groaning with unutterable intercessions in the depths of hearts which have no words to say.

## CHAPTER X.

## IN THE HOUSE.

SUMMER is not rich in ecclesiastical festivals; from Whitsunday forward there are few evangelical commemorations, until the year darkens into visible winter. There seems little reason why people who choose it, should not be able to remember the Saints lovingly, even on days called by their names, without much harm coming of the memorial; but these days should not be Sundays: the Lord's-day swallows up the lesser remembrance. It is not possible in the fulness of the sunshine to find out the stars: already this day is full of commemoration—a feast appointed for a special end. We cannot remember the Lord without remembering John and Peter; but we cannot call the Lord's-day St Peter's day, or St John's.

However, no one need find it hard to carry on for himself the thread of sacred story through all the

Sundays of the year ; for these summer days which, even in our climate, we could be fain to spend out of doors, how many wonderful open-air pictures remain for us in the gospel? The Sermon on the Mount, for example ; the extreme glory of the Transfiguration, which mazed its human witnesses ; the throngs who followed to the desert the Lord's benign footsteps, sitting down upon the grass in companies, while the disciples served them with the bread of His charity ; His walks afoot over these storied places—the pathway through the rustling corn, the rural road where He considered the lilies, the sands of Galilee, where He called His fishers from their boats. Evermore, to all ages, shines white among the summer slopes that city set upon an hill ; evermore the homely sparrows flit through the everyday air, familiar sureties of the Father's universal carefulness ; and, till the world ends, the sower shall sow his seed in those Judean furrows, and the reapers bind the sheaves as they bound them in the parable. Let us take their happiest use out of the Master's memorials. We, too, go about the fields, wander to the mountains, see the birds and the leaves, and the common processes of nature. I see no reason for the meagre calendar

which makes a glorious August harvest-day, golden and gorgeous, only the eighth or tenth Sunday after Trinity. Why should it not be the Day of the Corn-field, through which the sacred pathway passed, and where the disciples made their abstemious oriental meal from the golden spikes that waved round them, ripe for the reaping? or bear a recollection of that other time, when, after the weary day's travel, the Saviour sat by Jacob's well, when the fields were white around Him to the harvest, and drank the traveller's draught from the Samaritan's pitcher, blessing that wistful woman unawares? There are no lack of events in that overflowing story to accompany the Sunday pauses of our journey, and make bright the common current of our days.

Yet, perhaps, we might even turn with a tenderer interest from the fields where He walked, the desert where He triumphed, the garden in which He consecrated anew with His own name the old Sabbatic festival of God, to find the Lord in the house, meeting with common human creatures, doing human offices, receiving the kindly services of human friendship. The Son of man knew no home of His own after the beginning of His ministry, but He did not refuse to

· bless the homes of others, nor disdain to eat bread with those whom He came to save; and so it comes about that the life that embellishes the desert places, yields also home pictures familiar to our hearts, to make our dwellings and our tables sacred, if we will, with words which consecrated other tables, and tales which uphold for ever the domestic roof-tree of Jewish houses, long mouldered into their native dust.

It is strange how sadness has come to be a part of Christianity in the thoughts of so many. Christian people themselves often enough admit that they ought to be the happiest of people, yet admit it with a sigh—and people who do not profess to be Christians, make lugubrious caricatures of us, which, unfortunately, have sometimes their point of resemblance. On the same side come the solemn German mystics, who make up their eclectic systems with the most liberal latitude of symbols, and build with sentimental religiosity, a Sanctuary of Sorrow, which is anything but a Church of redemption. But this sanctuary of sorrow is a great cheat, however pretty it may be; and I think we ought to remember oftener, that sorrow is not an evangelical emotion. It is permitted because this unfortunate humanity cannot so persuade itself

of the glory of to-morrow as to calm in its heart the death-pang of to-day ; but it is the sad old wisdom of the olden ages, to whom the undeveloped gospel conveyed an equal salvation, but not an equal comfort, which bids us seek the house of mourning. That profound and musing melancholy, which, searching through all things human, finds in everything only a vacancy, a failure, a discord, ineffably sad to look upon, is not the philosophy of the gospel. *That* Preacher breathes the spirit of another time. He looks abroad upon a world which will not be sublimed into the conditions of a loftier being, where every man does the petty vanities which his father did before him, in which there is nothing new under the sun, nothing great, noble, heaven-like—all vanity, vanity, vanity of vanities!—and he sighs abroad upon the face of this chaos the exceeding sadness of his experience. One hope is in the firmament, but King Solomon knows only that it is, without knowing how it shall be. *He* has no mission of redemption, no cry of a deliverer to emancipate these ignoble slaves withal ; and had he stood with Paul at Athens, Solomon, too, might have sighed that sigh of hopeless dissatisfaction which steals like a breath of despair through all



the melancholy moralities of enlightened heathens. But where the sages of Greece knew only, as their noblest and most elevated sentiment, a grievous discontent against the meanness of humanity, and where Solomon sighs over the vanity of vanities, Paul startles the pagan echoes with the dauntless *reveille* of salvation. Sadness has nothing further to do in this atmosphere of life; go no more to the house of mourning, save with comfort and consolation! seek no longer the sanctuary of sorrow! all the sorrows in the world fall aside defeated, conquered, overthrown, from the religion of universal hope and renovation—the gospel of sunshine and of the day!

I do not even understand why dying, and the preparation for death, should occupy so large a space in the words and thoughts of Christians. The providence of grace, like the providence of nature, makes small account of elaborate preparations; and even the idea of securing comfort to ourselves on our death-beds is only a more elevated and spiritual adjustment of the cloak in which the dying Cæsar took the pains to die gracefully. It does not appear, indeed, why we should concern ourselves particularly about this last act of a warfare upon which the Lord permits no man

to set forth on his own charges. Of all the ordinary scenes of life, perhaps the death-bed scenes familiar to us in human writing, are the only ones which we find omitted in the Bible. There a man dies, and is gathered to his fathers, saying his last words, making his last devotions, only to the ears that love him, and to the hearing of his God. No man lingers through the last vicissitudes of suffering, no man passes slowly through the dark valley, in the histories of Scripture ; that event which befalls all men befel them, one after another, peacefully or with violence, as the case might be ; but the Holy Ghost, who tells the tale, tells only of the life with God, and makes brief account of the dying, which, doubtless, He accomplished for His servants as it pleased Him. Let us think of the life to whose lofty offices we are called. Let us leave our dying, whether it be to-morrow, or at the end of threescore years, to Him whom living we give our lives to ; and I think our Lord will undertake that last business for us—whether gracefully or not does not much matter—securely, joyfully, so that we shall have no reason to repent leaving it in His hands.

Tears are in the nature of humanity. I do not suppose that it is possible to reach to the bottom of

any man's heart, even with the touch of joy, without finding out that secret fountain of weeping which lies there in the depths; a certain pathos blends with every extreme emotion known to man. Love weeps at the reunion which for a life-long it has pined and wept *for*, looking forward to. An overflow of joy brings the perennial, everflowing tears, like rain, from the eyes of the happiest; even triumph breaks into sobs as well as shouts in the climax of his victory; and nothing human can penetrate far below the surface without finding out this well-spring. It is the most touching inarticulate expedient of our weakness for expressing the heart which will not go into words. Notwithstanding all this, sorrow is a defeated passion, a discomfited giant of the olden age. We are *permitted* to grieve because it is our nature; but grief is not an evangelical emotion, and does not belong to the gospel, which is a story of joy.

Nor is it the house of mourning to which our Lord carries His disciples in the years when He taught them by word and parable. He leads them instead to houses of rejoicing, to the festivals of life, into the very mid-current of existence—to that marriage-feast where his own special bounty contributes

to the banquet, and to the tables of the great, where, perhaps, these Galileans were strange guests. There was no ascetic meaning in His holy purpose concerning them. He meant that their lives should be large and full, spent in perpetual contact with the lives of others; so He took them to the tables of the Pharisee—to the wealthy house of the publican—to the domestic cares of that home at Bethany, where so careful a housekeeper as Martha must have had a liberal “enough” to cumber her. He who spent the night alone in holy communion with His Father, did not refuse to sanctify by day the crowds of Hebrew society, the boards of Jewish rejoicing. Simon the Pharisee, and Zaccheus the Publican, were persons very far apart in that community; but Jesus sat with the usual guests of each, not refusing this common society. It was no eclectic circle of refined minds which the Saviour collected about Him, to glorify the society of the world. He took His disciples abroad with Him to enter into the universal course, and learn the common experience of everyday life.

And of all the domestic pictures in the Bible, our imagination turns, with the most familiar interest, to that scene which every child knows—to the sisters in

the village-home, which the Divine narrative returns to more than once, to whom the dead came back out of the grave, whom the Lord admitted to his familiar acquaintance, yet who stand before us, as full of human character and individuality, as if our own eyes had seen them in this real to-day. Housekeeping Martha, busy with her kind solitudes of service, whom, doubtless, the poor neighbours blessed in Bethany, who lived like the woman of the Proverbs, eating no bread of idleness, keeping the warm life active in her household—the homely, kindly, friendly housewife—to whom, among her cares, one's heart warms. One does not know so well as if she had lived among ourselves, what special points of domestic comfort were these, about which the honest soul was most careful and troubled ; but, doubtless, her heart, which was a true heart, though not a meditative one, rejoiced in brightening the apartments and spreading fair the table where the Lord was to sit, and troubled itself with apprehensions lest the bread she served to His holy hands was not so delicate, so white, so sweet, as greater pains might have made it. Martha was not content to wait upon her Divine Visitor with a passive adoration. It troubled her to see her

sister sitting at His feet as though there was no duty towards Him, but only privilege. She would fain have had every one ministering, like herself, with humble hands to His visible comfort; and as she goes and comes about the house, in her anxious servitude—jealous lest He should be too slightly tended under the roof of which she was mistress, reproving with her eyes the listener, who heeded her not—her affectionate vexation bursts forth at length in an appeal to Himself—“Lord, carest thou not that my sister hath left me to serve alone?” She cannot do all she would with her own hands, active though they be. She would fain serve Him with much serving, as never guest was waited on before. It is a neglect to the Sublime Visitor that there should be one sitting calm in His presence—that everybody near should not be busy in offices of attendance, and Martha finds it in her heart to chide against her sister. Why does not Mary help in those blessed household cares which, for once, are a sacrament of thanksgiving?

And Mary sits by the while, lost in an ecstasy of listening, receiving the doctrine which dropped as the dew into her open heart, hearing such words as never

man spake before, looking with wistful eyes up to the face which she should yet see in agony, in death, in the resurrection glory—the face of God throughout all. She does not even know of her kindly sister's cares; she has no eye for the hints of Martha's anxious eye, nor ear for the solicitous household footsteps passing to and fro in the bustle of over-occupation. She does not even see the disciples lingering by, who listen too, but with perhaps a more perturbed regard. For there are no questions in Mary's heart—she does not inquire what this means or that—she loses everything in the certainty that she looks on her Lord, hears His beneficent voice, knows it is Him, the Messias, the Prophet which is to come. Little matters that have to be done with the hands do not occur to Mary—she has surrendered her whole heart in a breathless awe of worship. It is the Christ, the Son of God, the Hope of Israel. It is that Prince of David's holy house, whose throne is to stand fast for ever. It is He of whom all the prophets and the Psalms have spoken. She is lost in reverential, wistful, absolute devotion; for not for all Judea, not for the empire of Cæsar, would Mary consent to lose a word of all He says.

And there He sits who has been travelling all day long through the Judean highroads. Crowds have beset His steps as He travelled, the sick have been laid down in His way, the importunate voices of them that were ready to perish have echoed outcries of appeal from every turning of His road. Behind Him are those disciples, weary too, to whom, amid their great wistful love, He is a perpetual wonder, who are vainly toiling in their human understandings after all His Divine meaning, but who have not yet got the key; and without the house, doubtless, the village crowds are stirring; the invalids of Bethany lifting their pallid heads, the fathers and mothers, sick at heart with sudden hope, raising the sick children in their anxious arms, believing, and praying God to help their unbelief, that He will heal them. Wait but a little, O supplicants who will not come in vain!—wait without the door—you can spare a moment—the child will not die, the cripple will not faint, before the look of the Lord has healed them. Stand back for one breathless moment, and keep silence, for the sake of all those ages which shall not be blessed to come to His feet as you are now.

And He who knows how soon they are coming to



the door, to break the quiet of the household scene, completes it first and leaves it for us—a picture that shall last for ever. He who speaks, while Mary listens, notes Martha's homely adoration too, and does not blame it. He says nothing to stay the housewife in her serving. He does not discourage the womanly bustle of regard which would fain wait upon Him like a king. He does not bid the mistress of the house take the worshipper's place. Though Martha only catches a word as she comes and goes, He does not reprove her for the cares which prevail over her desire to hear Him. It is only when she is chafed and exclaims against her sister, making an appeal to Him, that He speaks with something like reproof; and even then it is not reproof so much as a gentle setting aside of her reproof, a vindication of the listener at His feet, who was of Heaven's own mind, and had chosen the one thing needful. The one thing needful! but the many things about which Martha's mind was troubled, the much serving which cumbered her, though they were not needful in the same sense, were comely and honest, and full of a homely devoutness of affection. Not a word, says the home-born Kinsman of our race against the house-

wifely anxieties of the humble heart that loved Him. Only the serving-man and serving-woman going about the house must not rise up against the tenderer soul, absolute in its devotion, which sits at the Lord's feet, and loses itself in the glory of His words and of His presence. Good is the kindly duty of the household, the warmest bond of comfort in the world ; but Mary hath chosen the better part, and sits where no power can dislodge her—at the feet of the Lord for ever.

It is scarcely safe to give superior rank to any development of human character. Somehow our own temperament always seems to each of us, in practice, though not perhaps in theory, the disposition most to be desired in others. The meditative classes, all of them, the philosophers, the thinkers, the tender enthusiast spirits of the Church, are very apt to look down from their ethereal elevation upon working-day people, and perhaps to despise the labouring men, and cumbered housewives, whose full hands carry on the common thread of life ; and these sober people smile in return at the contemplative countenances above them, or fret at the perpetual devotion which is not to be disturbed by the everyday incidents of

existence. Everybody knows and has heard how these two portions of humanity comment upon each other. If we could only make the world a little more incomplete, one-sided, and narrow than it is!—if we could but repeat ourselves all over the universe, and shut out the other individuality, which makes up where ours is wanting! But it is worth our while to notice that it is only when the one accuses the other, that our Lord has fault to find with either of these representatives of humanity. He is content that Martha should render service according to her nature and not against it. He does not confine all acceptable homage to the likeness of Mary's devotion. The sister who goes about the house does not disturb the Divine composure of His words. He is not displeased even that she hears them only in snatches, absorbed in her useful preparations for His service. It is only when Martha's impatience grows warm against her silent sister that the Lord covers her reproof with His vindication, and sets the worshipper above her momentary accuser. Martha is careful and troubled about many things. The Master bears with her tenderly till she judges another; but Mary, who judges no one, whose whole heart hangs on His

words, Mary hath chosen the better part. *She* does not say a word to defend herself—she makes no counter accusation—and the Lord silences one of His servants and justifies the other. There is room and verge enough in the economy of His providence, and not only room, but necessity, for both.

There are other domestic scenes in this same house, and in other houses of the New Testament—dwellings which the Lord entered with the hand of healing and the voice which said, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” But perhaps this is the most perfect picture of His household presence, Divine, yet unmiraculous, which is preserved to us. It is a picture full of beauty, full of tenderness—a perpetual garland and embellishment for homes which receive him now only in the spirit, and to which His human footsteps, apparent and audible, can never come.

## CHAPTER XI.

## ADVENT.

WINTER comes in melancholy mood to all the inferior world around us. There is no comfort out of doors, in the prospect of fields benumbed, and frozen streams, and trees which rustle dry and black against the flying clouds. The latest flowers are cold and harsh to look upon. The Christmas rose chills one like an icicle. Nature has suffered defeat, and her pride and glory are gone from her. She sits still, like the Esquimaux, in the dark, nursing the warmth of life deep down in her bosom, lest the chill should reach it. She makes no effort after her old effusions of exuberant life. She waits benumbed, only enduring the season of restraint, taking no comfort in it. It is an evil not to be made light of, the enemy of life.

But there is in the spirit of a man a perpetual con-

tradiction to these external influences. He whom the summer nights subdue into a natural pensiveness, and who muses with poetic sighs in the flush of June, collects all his forces in direct antagonism to the subduing force of winter. Accordingly, in every cold country, short of the hopeless arctic frosts, winter is the season of festivity. No sooner is the harvest done, and the trees bare, than the short days quicken towards the crowning season of the social year. This, which is Christmas in most lands of Christendom, is in some only the New Year; but the sentiment is one, though the names are different; and November has scarcely come, with its red sunsets, its short, sharp winter days, and local fogs, than the blood stirs resistant in the bosom of the race. Winter, ancient vassal of humanity, must be bearded to his face. The dead of the year, which subdues into a moan every voice of inferior nature, must ring with our shout, perpetual rebels against the material bonds which surround us;—and every advancing day of winter increases the throng together of perverse human creatures, piles higher the domestic fire, gathers closer the social circle, warms upward with a gradual progression into the most universal festival of life.

Yet this advent, in which every Sabbath-day is colder, and every morning darker than the one before, is to many of our brethren the advent of a season as discouraging, and more remorseless, than the winter of the beasts and of the fields. When there is no fire on the hearth, no blankets on the bed, no warm garments for the changing season, December brings few pleasures with it—and in the midst of our civilisation, and our wealth, and our luxury, there are a dreary amount of men and women amongst us, scarcely better protected than the savage citizens of nature, and deprived even of the savage freedom which might make up for their privations. Here, in the midst of the richest populations in the world, near, present, visible to ourselves, are many to whom the winter hybernation of the Esquimaux would be half a paradise. Extreme poverty benumbs like winter—and when everything like comfort fails, and life itself is but a consciousness of suffering, the nobler sentiments freeze in the breasts of the miserable. There is no sadder thing in the world than to find the remains of a life which “has known better days,” lost far away in those dismal depths of want and hardship—to find how hard it is to rouse out of that chill the

slumbering soul, which once was sensitive to all the hope and ambition of nature. Youth triumphs over everything in its inherent elasticity, but I question whether renewed sunshine ever fully thaws the maturer mind, which has been long held under the freezing torpor of extreme and absolute want. There is no influence equal to it, in its stupifying power; it is the very winter, the hopeless, icebound, arctic December of the human life.

And we do not half consider our personal responsibilities in this matter. Personal responsibility is a great bugbear of modern life. We can bear a drain upon our purse, an often repeated call on our attention. We can be liberal to an amazing and overwhelming extent, so long as a Society will manage it for us, or a public impersonal Institution administer our charity. The "voluntary contribution," which a man may give or withhold as he pleases, and which binds him to nothing, is the method of beneficence which recommends itself most to our prevailing ideas. We will be anything, but responsible for our fellow-creatures: we say it is no longer practicable. We cannot admit the wandering stranger into our own house: we can only support the House of Refuge



for his homelessness. We cannot undertake the heavy charge of bringing up an orphan; but we are free to subscribe to the Orphan Asylum, which is not an individual, and has no responsibility. Partially this is true—but the spirit of it is not true, though the fact is; and we who stand by to see our fellows and companions dropping behind in the cumbered march of life, disappearing through the trap-doors in the bridge, like the passengers of Mirza's vision, and are afraid to incur the responsibility of finding out whether a neighbouring hand might help them up, do well to hide ourselves among the crowd who satisfy their hearts and consciences by vague and impersonal liberality. This is a great evil of extreme civilisation. In the primitive ages all the charities are personal—"If she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted," says the apostle. But alas! we, if we lodged a stranger, might lodge, not an angel, but a thief unawares; we, if we brought up children, would have to charge ourselves with the responsibilities of their future, and incur blame from other people, for raising them out of their station, or for awakening injudicious expectations, or for false

kindness, or for cruelty, or for a hundred fantastical objections. It is far easier to subscribe to the societies. Strait rule and logic governs these impersonal institutions; they can mark to a hairsbreadth the exact extent of their responsibilities; and they can relieve hundreds where we only help individuals. Is not that best?

Yet, after all, it does not seem best; it is very good—no other system, perhaps, would meet the stupendous want which seems inevitable to our manner of existence; but charity by system can never supersede personal charity, or that which, without being charity, is better—kindness, helpfulness, neighbourliness, the “good at need” assistance of friendship. Perhaps there are many near us who never would have reached to the enervating apathy of want, had the eyes of their neighbours been open to perceive what a personal service might do for them. Benevolence, like everything else, has its danger. Do not let us be heroical in the first place; perhaps some one sinks by our side for want of a warm human hand put into his hand, to keep him up within the circle of possibility and hope. When he has sunk, and the winter of that gulf has closed over him, it will be hard work

to drag him up again; a little while longer, and he may be only fit for the dealing of the societies—a dull recipient of public charity: but to save a man from the pauper spirit is as good a deed as to save him from dying of starvation—it might be a better, the spirit being evermore superior to the body; at all events, it is a service which can only be done by one individual person to another, and over which an abstract public body, a Society, or an Institution, has no power.

At this time of the year, for example, everybody's household increases more or less in its expensiveness. *That* does not matter very much to a very large portion of the people of these kingdoms, who know the fact very well, and are able to make their calculations accordingly; but it does matter frightfully to the family whose head and support, perhaps from the frost, perhaps from a lull of business, perhaps because all the rest of the world begins to think of its Christmas bills, and look carefully to its expenditure, is suddenly out of work, and not only has nothing to spare for overcoats and blankets, but has to eat scanty bread out of the past or the future, eating up his little savings, if he has been thrifty, or mortgaging his painful days to come with

debt, if he has not. Does no one who reads know such a case? It is so common that labouring people reckon on it as a necessity of nature, though many times without being able to make any provision for its inevitable approach. I think if the choice lay between a subscription to a society, and keeping such a household privately afloat, the best service to the country and the race would be the personal service, which perhaps only two people, the gainer and the receiver, need know of. Let us bestir ourselves. The slumber of this chill is more fatal and more appalling than that frosty sleep which is death among the Alpine avalanches. Interfere, O soul that dwells at ease! Build high the fire in the hospice of neighbourly charity. By yourself, with no middleman between, help your brother! tide him over the ebb of his poor fortunes—save him from the miserable stupor and lethargy of absolute want—render him such kindly honest aid as an honest, ingenuous mind will be rather proud than ashamed to receive! It will be far easier, safer, a better exercise for mind and spirit, than if the poor man sank into torpid beggary, and all the galvanic appliances of systematic alms-giving had to be put in operation to drag him up.

For dragging up out of these depths is a painful, hazardous, seldom quite successful operation. Something of the soil generally clings to the fallen—some bit of self-respect, or honest shame, or independent feeling, falls into the mire with him, and is lost there. Public benefactions, too, seldom rouse the gratitude of those who receive them. They are accepted coldly, as they are obliged to be given—on either side a matter of business;—and the throngs who are served at the common table forget that warm hearts somewhere must have set all this mighty mechanical machinery in motion, and that almost every hospital and public institution is built at first out of the toils, out of the leisure, out of the very life, of some one good man, whose heart was moved in him at sight of a world lying helpless and in trouble, with no hand of succour stretched towards it. It is so, very near invariably, but no one remembers it;—there is now a business arrangement, clerks, housekeepers, committees, people who are experienced to judge between the real sigh of want and the whine of the mendicant; and there is the crowd pressing in, every man before his neighbour, for the mere material alms in which there is no sacredness. Those who are grate-

ful for the bounty are a very small minority, those who are the better for it, in heart or spirit, fewer still. Yet they are magnificent those public charities—one cannot refuse the applause which belongs to benevolence administered on so superb a scale. Nothing could fill their place if these societies and subscriptions failed in the land; yet they do not, cannot, never should be permitted to fill the higher place of individual kindness, that mercy which is indeed twice blessed when it passes direct from man to man.

Winter is come! it is the advent not only of religious festival, of social happiness, of family union, but of cold and frost, of starvation and hopelessness, of the dreadful compulsory idleness of those whose highest comfort is to eat spare bread by the sweat of their brow. And we, whose children are warm, whose board is bright, is there no cold hearth near where we could light the fire, no empty table which we could cover, without the world being the wiser? I cannot think there are half-a-dozen families in this country, in comfort themselves, who either do not or might not know of some other family which is often out of comfort, where the wolf is at the door many

times in a year, but which a quiet, heedful, unpretending succour might year by year raise higher in the social scale.

Are these secular considerations, and not thoughts for Sunday? But then Sunday has so many aspects. It is not alone a day for worship, a day for instruction. It is the weekly pause in which our own thoughts may well admonish us. It is the regular returning interval of quiet among all our toils and labours, when no man can molest us, when strangers are not likely to interrupt our privacy, when we are safe from all the harder pressures of the world. I think it is very well to take time to consider all our concerns under the composing influence of this day. We cannot divide ourselves into two persons—a secular man and a spiritual one—as we can divide the week-day and the Sabbath, but I doubt much if either is better for the separation. One might be bold enough to consider even one's business, one's perplexities, the external matters which mould one's everyday life, in this periodical retirement from them, when standing apart one can judge better of the commonest right and wrong, and when the sacred atmosphere of this Christian rest, ever full of a

reminder that all these cares are but for a time, and presently will be over, should open the eyes and enlarge the motives of every Christian man. For the Sabbath is not a day which can lie cold and unproductive by itself on the surface of the others, no better than a milestone to mark the way. One way or another, this weighty leisure, the seventh part of our lives, must tell upon us. The frivolous and petty week which culminates in a Sunday only more petty and frivolous, will, without question, produce ignoble successors. This, however active and quick-witted it may be, cannot be called a thoughtful age. The quiet lives which once were lived out of the strife of common cares, in country places, or in the old, undisturbed, hereditary society of an old town, are a great deal less frequent than they used to be. Nobody has any time for anything beyond the engrossing necessities of daily life; and doubly beneficent comes the Sunday which gives us breathing time—the leisure in which our ravelled threads of purpose may wind themselves into something tangible—the sacred quietness in which evil plans may stand rebuked and good ones thrive. It is for this cause that I think no harm in bringing in very matter-of-



fact and actual concerns into the considerations of the day. It is in this day, in the highest of all meanings, to be the poetry of our life, hallowing the prose and common measure of existence with a very inspiration—for which reason it seems well that everything should be brought under its influence, and no single consideration of our lives excluded, as profane, from the sacred limits of the Sabbath-day.

And if it be not ill to consider for ourselves, it is surely well to bethink us of our neighbour, and anything we can do for him, to arrange our possibilities for God's service and for man's service, and to make the Sunday the key of the week, opening up that little representative space of all our future, in which things unthought of wait to meet us, and paths unknown lie before our feet to tread.

And now in the chill and darkening of the year, when all nature is adverse, and only our own obstinate vitality holds out, we begin to think of the annual remembrance which the usage of most Christian Churches celebrates in the depth of winter—the first coming of our Lord.

It is impossible to find anywhere incidents of more extreme and touching beauty than those which the

one evangelist who enters into detail, discloses to us in his narrative of the time which preceded the birth of our Lord. Nothing in external nature moves to proclaim the fulness of time which was attained. There are neither meteors, nor portents, nor miraculous conjunctions in the tale. His inspiration saves the historian from all the vulgar fancies with which human writers of the early times announce an extraordinary advent and please an uncultivated people. There are no strange sights seen in the sky, nor sounds in the air—everything is at its wont in Judea, in Galilee, throughout the Holy Land. The priests serve in the temple by their courses, the people gather without to their accustomed worship. There is not a sign to tell that the time of this dispensation is well-nigh over, and that presently everything shall be changed. On the contrary, the Lord delays his coming—Where is the promise of his appearing? All things stand as they were from the foundation of the world. The sceptre trembles in the hand of that poor tributary king who is still of David's race, but no imperial courier has pointed out the way by which Shiloh is to come.

And in the quiet of the common day, when every-

thing is still in Jerusalem, and life goes on as it has gone for a hundred years, without excitement, and without expectation; when the outer courts of the temple are busy with their usual crowd of sinners and of Pharisees, men who come to pray, and men who come to be seen of other men; when the money-changers are still at their tables, and the doves flutter in their cages, and the scribes expound the law, and the doctors split the straws of scholastic argument; when the only worshipper, visible to us, is a grey-haired priest, appearing before God in his turn of service, burning fragrant incense within the sacred enclosure—then suddenly the bright-robed Gabriel glides out of heaven, startling the dulness of a long blank of unprophetic years—the messenger of the Lord. He stands by the altar among the costly odours of the incense, a sudden appearance, strange and alarming to the homely old man in his priest's office, who was not a prophet, nor gifted, and knew no reason why this splendid emissary of Heaven should come to him. Zacharias was but one of many—a man without distinction—only just and blameless, and walking in all the ordinances of the Lord; he was old, and nothing out of ordinary experience had disturbed his God-

fearing life before. Even the universal Hope of Israel, the Prophet which was to come, was out of his personal hopes, limited already to the royal tribe; why, then, to him came Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God? he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. The prophets and oracles of God had ceased for more than three hundred years, and the grey-haired son of Aaron drew back with a perplexed and fearful mind, gazing through no darker a veil than that perfumed cloud of incense upon the brightness which had come but now out of God's very presence, the countenance and investiture of heaven.

The priest was long in the sanctuary; no one could tell why, of all who waited without. He was alone, and no other mortal shared in this interview. When he came forth Zacharias stood among them, a man dazzled and mazed by the glory he had seen. They knew at sight of him that he had seen a vision. He beckoned to them with his hands, but had no voice to speak to them. And there the speechless man continued till the days of his ministration were over, walking dumb before the Lord, paying the penalty of his faint heart, going out and in among the worshippers, but able to tell no man what strange

thing had befallen him—musing in the strange solitude of his privation over the miraculous slopes of Zion, treading, unawares, the mount and the garden where the salvation of his race was to be accomplished, and pondering dimly, like a man and a Levite, how these things were to be. It would seem by the after occurrences at his son's birth that he had not even communicated to any one what the revelation was which left this effect upon him. No one knew that the mantle of Elijah hung in an invisible prophetic glory over the grey head of Zacharias. No one knew that the child, about to be born to him, was no common Hebrew infant, to be named after his father's name, and inherit his father's office in the priesthood, but a miraculous John—a gift of God—the messenger of the covenant. And so the dumb man tarried to do his duty, and when his course of service was over, hastened out of Jerusalem to his home among the hills; and the common day, and the unexpectant life, went calmly on as before.

Then came a little interval of time—a solemn time—the great mystical breathless calm which falls before the great hours and events of providence. Mary was in her house at Nazareth, a betrothed maiden—Mary,

whose early years the Church of Rome weaves into a series of legends much more miraculous and unearthly than the early years of her Son, but of whom this narrative says nothing, except her name and her lineage, and the espousal which throws a sweet composure and gravity on her youth. She, too, is alone and quiet, in the domestic stillness, busied about her home concerns, or thinking the thoughts of a beginning life, or lifting her humble heart to the God of her fathers. Perhaps something solemn overshadowed Mary's thoughts, as it must have done those of many a former Mary, born of that same line—the sublime possibility, common for many generations to every woman of the royal race, that of her the Messiah might come. The faithful in Israel kept the promise in their hearts, and knew how it was limited; and the old holy music of her ancestral line had descended with David's blood to maiden Mary in her Galilean village. She was of the race and lineage of the poets, no less than of the princes of Israel, and when, through her solitude came the sudden voice of her visitor from heaven, Mary's trouble to hear his "Hail" was not like the trouble of Zacharias. She "cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be." She was

not dismayed in her humility; she asked for no sign whereby she might know this, as the startled priest had done in the temple. But when Gabriel had discharged his Divine errand and disappeared from her sight, Mary's human heart was too full to return to the quiet occupations amongst which this marvellous announcement had found her. She could not rest in the house where the glory of the angel's presence lingered in the stillness, but when no further message came, she arose and went in haste a toilsome journey through half the length of Palestine, from her own distant quarter up through Galilee and Samaria, to the hill country of Judea; went up through the silence of the holy history, from which we only know that she went "in haste," with thoughts which are not for our guessing, yet which we may conceive, and did not rest till she met the greeting of her kinswoman, the prophetic words which echoed the salutation of the angel. Then Mary's heart, which had been silent all this way, swelled forth into the woman's psalm of Scripture. From the heart of Rachel and the lips of Hannah, Mary, more blessed than they, took up the song which had been rising in her soul through all her silent journey. Her soul magnified the Lord, her

spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour. The curse of the woman had turned into the woman's glory. The reproach of Eve was lost for ever in the blessedness of Mary; and, from the fulness of a heart inspired, the child of David sang her woman's song of supreme and ineffable thanksgiving, the voice of a thousand generations, from the first mother down to the mother of to-day.

This is the gospel preface to the gospel; it is of events absolutely unknown and unnoted by the world. An old godly, sober pair, among the hills, both of the priestly stock of Aaron, both blameless, righteous, old—going down, as they thought, to the grave, with no child to keep their remembrance in Israel, or to link their failing lives with the generation to come; and a woman, young, poor, of a lot already settled and circumscribed by her espousals, of a race which was too plentiful to carry princely rank as a necessary attendant of the blood of kings, and of a village far away, amid the broken and mixed population of Galilee, which bore but ill repute in the estimation of Judea:—To the old man and to the maiden, each in solitude, appears suddenly the celestial messenger; each of them goes their way in profound silence, com-



municating to no one what has befallen them ; each of them, in the climax and overflow of their hearts, bursts forth into the Hebrew privilege of psalms, blessing the God of Israel who has remembered His promise. Zacharias seeks his house in haste to communicate his vision and its promise to Elisabeth ; and in haste Mary rises up, in her youth and eagerness, to travel that weary, long journey through Samaria, to seek the sympathy of the same mother in Israel. There are but three persons in this strange, holy, overwhelming secret. Even Joseph does not know that his bride is that woman of all women, whom every mother of the race has hoped to be ; and the high priest in the temple, the chief of the Jewish economy, has no thought that his humble brother in the holy place knows of the end which approaches to that dispensation, and that the speechless man, who hastens to his home among the hills, bears with him the earliest note of Advent—the first glimmer of the coming dawn. The world, the religious and enlightened world of Judea, passes on its lofty way, thinking of nothing less than the knowledge far above its finding out, which has come to those humble travellers in the hill country ; and the common people

meet the Galilean maiden on the way, without a thought of the restoration of Israel, the blessing which rests upon her humble head. But these hearts throb with the knowledge which burns within them; and already the wheels of providence move towards this mighty act of God, ordering magnificently the affairs of empires to a humble furthering of the circumstance which God has long ago ordained for the coming of His Son. And perhaps already the Chaldean firmament glows with the promise of another Star, and the wise men, looking out with anxious eyes upon the heavens, begin to think upon a journey, whither they know not, to hail the coming King. The heavens are stirred to watch the Glorious Exile going forth upon His self-appointed banishment; the angels learn again how to disclose themselves to men. Mary, at home in the house at Nazareth, the handmaid of the Lord, awaits His pleasure; and all the world passes on its way, eating and drinking, building and pulling down, thinking no more of the slow approaching Advent than we do of that other coming, which shall conclude the fortunes of this human race for evermore.

## CHAPTER XII.

## CHRISTMAS.

THERE are always some people in the world whose tears only flow the faster for the coming of those times and seasons which call upon all to rejoice. Never festival dawned upon this earth which did not by its sunshine, its warmth, and glow of joy, aggravate somebody's solitude and mournfulness. When the season of family meeting comes, one thinks with a heavier pang upon the broken families which can meet no longer, upon the brothers and sisters dead or scattered like the leaves, upon the fathers and mothers who will never more assemble round them their distant and separated children, upon the little blossoms of the race which have fallen long before their time. These memories cling to the Christmas feast as surely as memories of joyfulness. When the diminished all comes round the table, then is the time to feel to

one's heart the vacant places; and everybody's rejoicing makes sick the soul which bows under immediate calamity. So it is not possible to come to the age of thought without learning something more of a universal holiday than its pleasures. If this Christmas should, by God's grace, be joyful, we remember us of another which was grievous; if we are in the light some one else is in the shadow—perhaps our household gathering, seen afar off, penetrates some solitary soul, left alone by the deserted hearth, with an unspeakable pang of contrast. It is so always—it never can be otherwise while we and death dwell together in a world to which the resurrection has yet to come.

This thought adds a certain pathos to the gladness of the year—that pathos without which nothing human can be perfect; and it ought to do more—it ought to open our sympathies towards our neighbours who are less happy, or more happy, than we are. One year is going and another coming. It is one of the reckoning times of life. Scarcely can the youngest of us restrain the backward glance, which involuntarily turns to last year and the years before. The very children note the differences—how much more

those who are no longer children, who begin to learn life's graver lessons, and who can already reckon the steps of their instruction by the memorial days of a personal calendar! I think this remembrance should give a special tenderness to all our thanksgiving—a trembling, not servile, but aware of the manner of human existence, and how its ill and well are mingled. To-day it is God's pleasure that all should be well with us—to-morrow has a certain awe in its unrevealed and invisible courses which He holds hidden in His hand. Let us not forget the cloud which was once with us, and is now with our neighbour—pray Heaven it break in blessings upon every head that is bowed down!—so that for the joy and the grief together, and for the strain of life which they make between them, we may all alike thank God.

And amid graver thoughts, one might venture to say, that it was a pleasure to think how many there are always in the world who can manage to be happy without much occasion for it, and fall into a natural joyfulness, without particular consideration whether there is due ground for the same. There are all the children, to whom this gift belongs by nature; there are a great many of the young people—more

than these happy spendthrifts of their own bright days care to allow ; and there are, besides, a goodly proportion of humble, unspeculative, unphilosophic hearts, who are content to take every day as it comes from God's hands, and to make that the limit of the single-minded duty which keeps their faces bright ; so that, one way and another, there are always enough of us, happy by gift of nature or blessing of Providence, to keep the feast.

And now it is the midnight of the year—the dead of winter, as they say in Scotland. The latest leaf upon the bough has fluttered to the wintry ground, and the earliest bud has not begun to swell. The days are dark, the life of nature stagnant, and even from the red wintry sunshine, and the splendour of the frosty moon, people hurry to the glimmer of comfort within doors—the household heart which keeps warm through all those fogs and chills. Was it on such a night as these resplendent ice-cold hours, through which the stars sparkle and the dews congeal, that the shepherds watched their flocks in the fields of Bethlehem ? But however that may be, it is certain that, through centuries of such nights, sharp through the frosty air, has rung the echo of the

angels' song, coming down with homely voices of practical simplicity and comfort, from the glory of that first proclamation of Heaven.

God rest you, merry gentlemen,  
Let nothing you dismay ;  
Remember Christ, our Saviour,  
Was born on Christmas-day.

Well ! is it not enough ? The voice is plain and the music rude, I grant you. What then ? He was born. It is all that can be said if you lavish on it all the language of cultivated nations. What should dismay us ? The frost or the chills, the toil or the poverty, the death or the grief ? Nay, God rest you, gentlemen ! stand up in your stature of man, the body which He wears, above all those vassals of your race. He was born ! The old legends say that "Pan is dead," burst like a sob from the heart of heathendom when Jesus came. Our native rulers, lords of the islands and the valleys, tutelary gods of every soil, spirits of the earth and of the air, of the flesh and of the mind, die and fly like Pan before the same pursuer. He was born before whose face the evil spirits writhed in tortures of self-confession—to whom these demons had but one terrified petition to offer—"Send us away." He, the bright-

ness of whose face their spiritual consciousness could not endure—He is come! He was born! and were it not for the unspeakable weakness of our humanity, what should be great enough to dismay us thereafter I cannot tell.

But though the common consent of Christendom has made the mid-winter shine with this anniversary, there are still some countries to which the yearly festival is only a celebration of time—a burst of irrestrainable nature—an impulse of defiance to all the ignoble material agencies which then unite against us. Even in that view, it is in reality the fittest season for our perverse rejoicings. In summer, nature is harmonious with as much gladness as we can accomplish, takes upon herself, indeed, the business of entertaining us, fills the very air with an exhilaration which few people can quite resist, soothes trouble with her tenderest voices, and covers want with the robe of her sunshine. In the summer, a beggar, if he gets but crumbs enough, is almost an enviable wayfarer, and poverty forgets half its pangs when it can bask in the sun, and the chill melts out of its frame. But winter comes, and the scene is changed—everything that was hard before is harder now. It is harder



to labour, more dismal to be sick, and hunger is twice as sore, when cold pierces to the heart as well. If there is a vulnerable point about us, the biting wind of this adversity finds it out. Gloomy and close presses down upon us this winter of our discontent. If it were possible, we might roll ourselves up like the inferior creatures, and sleep it out ; but human nature rouses before the impossibility. Since there is no eluding it, let us take occasion of mirth from the efforts of our enemy ; stand close, neighbours ! keep out the cold, the discouragement, the languor—stand firm on the privileges of that humanity which is not dependent on external nature—which is higher of origin and destiny than all the elements—which triumphs over winter and time, and all the assailants of merely mortal life ! We, who are immortal, and have a life unquenchable within us—are we to yield to this outside and temporary enemy ? No ! Let us hail the years cheerily, though they make us older. Let us defeat the winter with a heart which he cannot chill—for the years and the snows are things of a day, and we, as we know in the depths of our hearts, in the inalienable conviction of our nature, we are for ever !

And there is abundant occasion and opportunity to pause upon these wintry Sundays, which stand at the gates of exit and of entrance, through which must pass the years. It is quite common to smile at the common impulse which makes joyful commemoration of birth-days and days of the New Year. Every year makes us older, brings us nearer the grave, moralised the wise men of a hundred years ago, who loved to speak of gloomy shades, and inverted torches, and all the heathen paraphernalia of the tomb. Yes, verily! they were well to mourn, those sad old heathens, who groped all their lifelong for their God, and haply found Him unawares, though we know it not; but time has no such advantage over us, who are aware how steadily this servant of God travels towards our consummation, towards the end of all sorrows, towards the house and rest of God. And there are few years which do not give us abundant matter to pause upon, as the weeks and the days marshal themselves in involuntary reckoning before the period which they compose falls off, rounded and complete, into the past. Henceforward this is finished and unchangeable; but still, in this last December Sunday there is time to hang a jewel in the ear of the Ethiop,

to leave a glow of sunset on his departing, to brighten, at the latest moment, the almost completed memory of the old year.

Then comes the new. What is it? Not a big virgin globe of time—the perfect sphere of a full period. No; only to-morrow, nothing more. To-morrow is an infinite future to a child—is it less to us? It may be all to us for aught we know; it is the whole of time in an impersonated day. There is no grasping a bigger portion with these faculties of ours. The year comes, but only in the guise of a wintry, chilly morning, single hours, wherein the hoar-frost takes as long time to melt, and the mists to lighten, as if it held no representative character. It is the New Year; but it is only to-day. God gives us no more at a time out of his ark of providence. It shews us what a little matter our providence is, and how it becomes us to live that day heartily which represents all time while it remains among our hands.

There was no feast at Bethlehem when Cæsar's census stirred the scattered population of the Holy Land; yet, that temporary revolution which carried these tribes to their own quarters, was a home-gathering, in a sense, as ours is. The heathen emperor had

planned this among his big imperial purposes for an end, which it served, doubtless, to his august satisfaction. All the world of barbarians and half-discovered nations, the Britons and Gauls, which were to that day what the Africans and Patagonians are to this, arose from their huts and woodlands to number their manhood at the will of the emperor. The regnant and superior race took measure of its vassals and tributaries, from one end to the other of that strip of soil which they called the world; and in the midst of the universal stir, out of the seaside village came that carpenter, who was of David's race, and had to be numbered among his own people. Joseph now shared the Divine secret with his betrothed and his kinsfolk, and the two went upon their way together, the same road which Mary had once taken in eagerness and haste alone. The house of David had not withered into a single stock, as royal houses do so often. It had flourished with an oriental fulness; so many families bore the same honour, that the two Nazarites ranked among a host of neighbours without distinction. The village khan was crowded with those far-descended branches of the princely family. Perhaps Joseph and Mary lingered on the way. When they

got there no room remained for them. They found nothing better than a shelter, although they do not seem to complain of it. The travellers who had arrived before them had already appropriated all the comfort that was to be found in this little Judean town. The Bethlehemites were busy with their influx of visitors. Old friends were finding each other out; tired wayfarers were getting to rest; perhaps young scions of the race were eagerly wandering about the old walls which they had never seen before, gazing at the well whose water David longed for, and at the legendary place where Jesse's household flourished. If there was a special glory in the night, as the Star of Advent settled over the stable roof, no one observed it. They were taken up with personal fatigue, with family associations, with the thought of hereditary glory—glory all the dearer, perhaps, that the last ray of it faded in the feeble sceptre of Herod, and that all these groups, with a king's blood in their veins, had come up hither to answer to the requirement of a pagan suzerain. Doubtless, they thought of that with a national bitterness in the excitement of their arrival—where was the restoration of Israel?—and no one knew that in that humble refuge, where the latest

arrived took shelter, where the door was closed upon the child and the mother, He who had the government upon His shoulders, David's divinest Son had come.

Three hundred years and more had come and gone darkly upon these countries without voice of prophet or vision of angel. The Hebrews had fallen out of acquaintance with the inhabitants of heaven. For so many centuries the miraculous people had lost their privilege of visible communication with their God. The just among them had lived by faith, holding fast to their thread of prophecy; and the foolish-wise among them had embroidered the law of God with traditions and improvements of their own. The voice of God and the friendship of heaven, so far as outward tokens went, had ceased in the land, and angels were to this present race only what angels are to us—spotless creatures of the imagination, invisible citizens of heaven. But the day of the angels had come again with the day of the Lord. Already these messengers had borne their errand to Zacharias, to Mary, and to Joseph. Either they celebrated now, in a burst of spectator-enthusiasm and devoutest worship, the accomplishment of a purpose which had long been known

to them, or else, in a rapture of heavenly surprise and wonder, they learned, for the first time, how God's mercy to man was to be justified. But while all the world is indifferent, those splendid subjects of our Master are busy hurrying to and fro, carrying the tidings of the Advent. The heavens are stirred though Judea is quiet. The race which is to be saved takes calmly the suggestions of Providence, and proceeds on its way with an extraordinary human composure and ignorance, more wonderful than anything else in the world; but the race which knows neither sin nor danger, the souls sublime in innocence, who stand before God for ever, are moved with a glorious heavenly excitement which bursts into recognisable appearance in this night of wonders. The hearts of the angels overflow in an ecstasy of generous triumph. Perhaps at last, after ages of pondering, they have caught sight of the mystery of God; and the heavenly bands can no more keep silence than the human creatures below can perceive that magnificent vindication of all His long forbearance which God makes visible to-night in the sight of all the world.

Wherefore, the heavens cannot contain the shout of that angelic triumph; the skies burn with the pre-

sence of an innumerable company, thronging upon each other to gaze upon the spot where the Lord has gone. Under the dews and the stars lie the village shepherds, folded in their eastern mantles, watching their sheep among the fragrant grass, speaking to each other, perhaps, of the crowds of David's sons who will be taxed in Bethlehem; perhaps, if they are thoughtful men, as shepherds use, looking up to the skies which He has framed, and the heavens, which are His handiwork; and marvelling in their Hebrew souls, with the fervour of faith and patriotism, when He will think upon His people, and restore the kingdom to Israel. The hum of the village is silent in the distance. The eastern towers and house-tops rise dark in the light of the stars; there is no sound but the browse of the sheep among the dewy grass—a sound which makes the silence deeper—and I think, as the midnight grew around them, these watchers, used to solitude, must have fallen into silence and their own thoughts, as was fitting to the time.

When, suddenly, the dew on the plains shone diamond bright, in a light which was not of the midnight nor of the morning. One spokesman out of



heaven bends over them in glorious eagerness to tell the tale, and before the accents of that single voice have died upon their ears, the unrestrainable cry bursts from the companies of heaven. It is as when the morning stars sang together; the spontaneous triumph over-floods those generous lookers-on, who see us in our toils and meannesses, yet despise us not. Oh holy God, glorified in the highest! Oh sinful men, to whom the heart of heaven is peace and good-will! All words, even of angels, are lost in the glory of this that is accomplished at Bethlehem. With their angel-arms gleaming high over the holy country, their angel-voices sounding forth that glory into earth and heaven, the music of their proclamation rings once into the darkness and is over. No repetition could expand the amazing truth, which even these heavenly powers exhaust themselves in once telling. What more could men or angels say?

Yet there is a wonderful difference between the human and the heavenly actors in this brief and marvellous scene. The angels disappear into an invisible glory, from which they shall come again, single ministrants, to linger about the Divine pathway, and lend their tender service to the man who is born

to-night. The shepherds rise up to turn their dazzled eyes towards the glimmering towers of Bethlehem, to hear the browsing of the sheep disturb with a painful distinctness the awe of night around them, to draw closer their garments bedewed with the moisture of the grass, and look to each other, pale, wondering, and silent, with a common impulse and counsel. "Let us go and see this thing which has come to pass," they say to each other beneath their breath; and so turn away by the midnight byways, through the fields, with perhaps, a thought which lingers on the browsing sheep even amid the solemnity of the angel's tale—and go slowly through the half-closed gate into the little city, still excited with its guests, and awake long beyond its usual time.

Perhaps another party, with their servants and their camels, their foreign faces and unknown garments, travel down the road from Jerusalem at this same moment, yet never pause to ask the way; but the shepherds, taught of articulate voices, carrying for their surety a simple token, seek the child who is laid in a manger, and never look to the heavens to find that star which lingers overhead and lights the way.

Peace on earth! Oh, simplicity and wisdom, old man and infant, philosopher and shepherd, stand round the cradle of the better time! But not alone to the Oriental Magi and the Hebrew peasant rings aloud the good-will of the Christian dawn. To the Gaul, in his barbarous force and onslaught, to the wild warriors of the approaching tide, to the islands of the seas, the furthest ends of an undiscovered world! Strange beyond all tumult of those ages—beyond Attila, and Alaric, and Cæsar—beyond all the persecutions, and tyrannies, wars, massacres, and outrages of those dark centuries, to find that dim plain of Bethlehem under its stars, the angel-glory bursting forth in the calm heavens, and all the echoes of all the world learning evermore, though it takes ages long to know the lesson, that glory which is to God in the highest, and which on earth is good-will to men!

If this remembrance does not conquer the sentiment of winter, I do not suppose anything can—and it is surely only in the spirit of this that we can rejoice in the incoming of those New Years, of which never one comes into the world without pangs and heartaches in it, sore enough to make us fear every

successor on the way. If we do not fear them—if beyond that happy elasticity of nature which rebounds from every blow, we have good reason not to fear those mechanical instruments of Providence which are less noble and less permanent than we, the whole secret of our courage springs from that birth at Bethlehem. Only once to apprehend it fully, is to make human nature capable of all things; and even the dim general apprehension of an event so wonderful, suffices to surround, with the tenderest circumstances of human cheer and encouragement, the season which somehow, by common consent, has been appropriated to this commemoration. Good-will to men has become the custom of the time—good wishes have grown natural to the season. And those Sabbath-days, in which the glow and gladness of His birth unites with the unfailing remembrance of His resurrection—those days of rest and of the Lord, in which we dismiss a year solemnly out of our hands, content with its labours and its sorrows, which are His sending—leaving its sins humbly in his Mediator-hand—and take up another year with hope and courage, knowing nothing of what is in it, knowing only that He knows, and finding in that knowledge all

security—might well be special Sundays, full of good works and comforts, liberal charity and hope. For we have those always with us to whom winter, and its evil influences, is more than a sentiment—who want to have the reality conquered as well as the imagination—and who will understand all the better for the warm touch of human hands full of kindness, how to the poorest and to the saddest rings out of heaven, with a special fulness, that cry of joy out of the hearts of all the angels, which proclaims to every winter, to all gloom, sorrow, and discouragement, their glorious Adversary and Conqueror, through whom the glory of the highest God becomes good-will on earth and to men !

## CONCLUSION.

I HAVE paused many times with a fear lest the suggestions of the preceding chapters might seem a presumption, coming from one so entirely without authority. I trust no one will think so. A book is a letter to one's unknown friends, it is said, and every one employed in making books must have felt one time or another an impulse to escape out of the common track of everyday labours, and say something, if it were only a word, of recognition and friendship, which seems all the kindlier to one's own consciousness, if it is entirely out of one's ordinary way. I meant to have taken one Sunday in every month, as so many points in the yearly progress, into which so many marks in the sacred history might naturally fall; but design and execution are different things, and the result is not quite what it was meant to be. But every one has special facilities for making a personal calendar—every man knows for himself what events

and what emotions move him most strongly ; and the only one thing which can be said certainly is, that the days of our Lord are good companions through the days of our life, and that there might be a noble and gracious economy in taking the individual advantage of individual scenes and appearances—those appearances and scenes which are all for us and belonging to us, and not one of which bears less than a special reference to our circumstances and ourselves.

A writer who has no vocation to instruct, may well be modest in dealing with subjects so weighty ; yet I cannot remember the pleasure which Christian people feel in finding, as at the present time, the heroes of this day, whose names are in every mouth, men who revive the old fame of chivalry and do the deeds of romance—to be men who, after the strictest sects of our religion, have followed and served the gospel—without feeling that it is good to take every grace and advantage of nature into the retinue and attendance of God's Church and people. There are strange enough pictures of "the religious" current in these days ; and in the face of the pious ogres of modern fiction, and even of the commonplace biographists of good intentions, one cannot deny a

human cheer and exhilaration, in finding out that the profanest imagination among us is compelled, for once in its life, to swell the universal shout of honour which hails in the name of the Indian general the name of a man who has even preached, and prayed, and exhorted, but has not managed, by these exercises, to dim his courage or to blunt his sword ; and that there is not a man of science in Christendom who may not be content to doff his cap to the African explorer, who went upon his Master's work into the heart of an unknown continent, and preaching and teaching all day long, found out for science, and for commerce, and even for literature, more good and more promise, in that undiscovered country, than all the hunters, and all the traders, and all the geographers, had ever dreamt of before. These men are not of the enlightened and liberal Christianity which does its worship and its service with decorum, and does not put itself out of breath or composure for its religion. On the contrary, their religion fills their hands with a hundred offices which easier people take no trouble with ; and, in spite of all, the one and the other, has found leisure to leap into the foremost ranks of fame, and take by storm the hearts and sympathies of all who



speaking their language over the world. I cannot help feeling the most narrow-minded and unmagnanimous delight in this triumph of the Church over the world. Our clever people may even amuse themselves with their caricatures at their own pleasure. But the men whose achievements make even romance commonplace, the men who do impossible things, whose ardour, and honour, and bravery, are of the old chivalrous days, are this day, as it happens, the strait, narrow, limited men of religion, whom it is so easy to make sport of, when one has everything one's own way.

However, there are but a few at any time who can be heroes; yet as for our private selves, in our private houses, we could still expand and brighten to an unlimited extent. At present we are not spirits, but human creatures, and it becomes us not only to aspire towards the heavens, but to set our foot down firmly on the soil, where, on every hand, by God's care and providence, curses have turned into blessings. I think it is a purely heathen imagination which makes death the great event of nature, and would fain make our living a mere preparation for it. Every year makes us older, every year brings us nearer to death and the

grave, says this pagan philosophy. Nay, not so ; it is life and heaven we are drawing nearer. Death is only an effect and a medium, it is the cause of nothing but some natural tears and sorrow which dry up in time. Death of itself brings no everlasting condemnation ; it is for the life to do that, the unconsidered hours which this philosophy makes so secondary and unimportant beside the death-hour, yet which are, in truth so much more weighty. What we have to do in the world is to live ; and the fairer, the fuller, the nobler, and the more natural that the life of Christianity is, it will all the more confound the adversary, and be liker to the Lord.

THE END.